

**THE
GREATER GLORY**

WILLIAM DUDLEY PELLEY



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Grace Beason
Christmas 1922
From Mother & Father.



THE GREATER GLORY





They came back to town, his arm about her shoulders, hers
about his waist. FRONTISPIECE. *Page 122.*

THE GREATER GLORY

By WILLIAM DUDLEY PELLEY



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To My Mother

GRACE GOODALE PELLEY

WHOSE LIFE HAS INCLUDED MANY OF THE

SITUATIONS WHICH FOLLOW

THIS BOOK

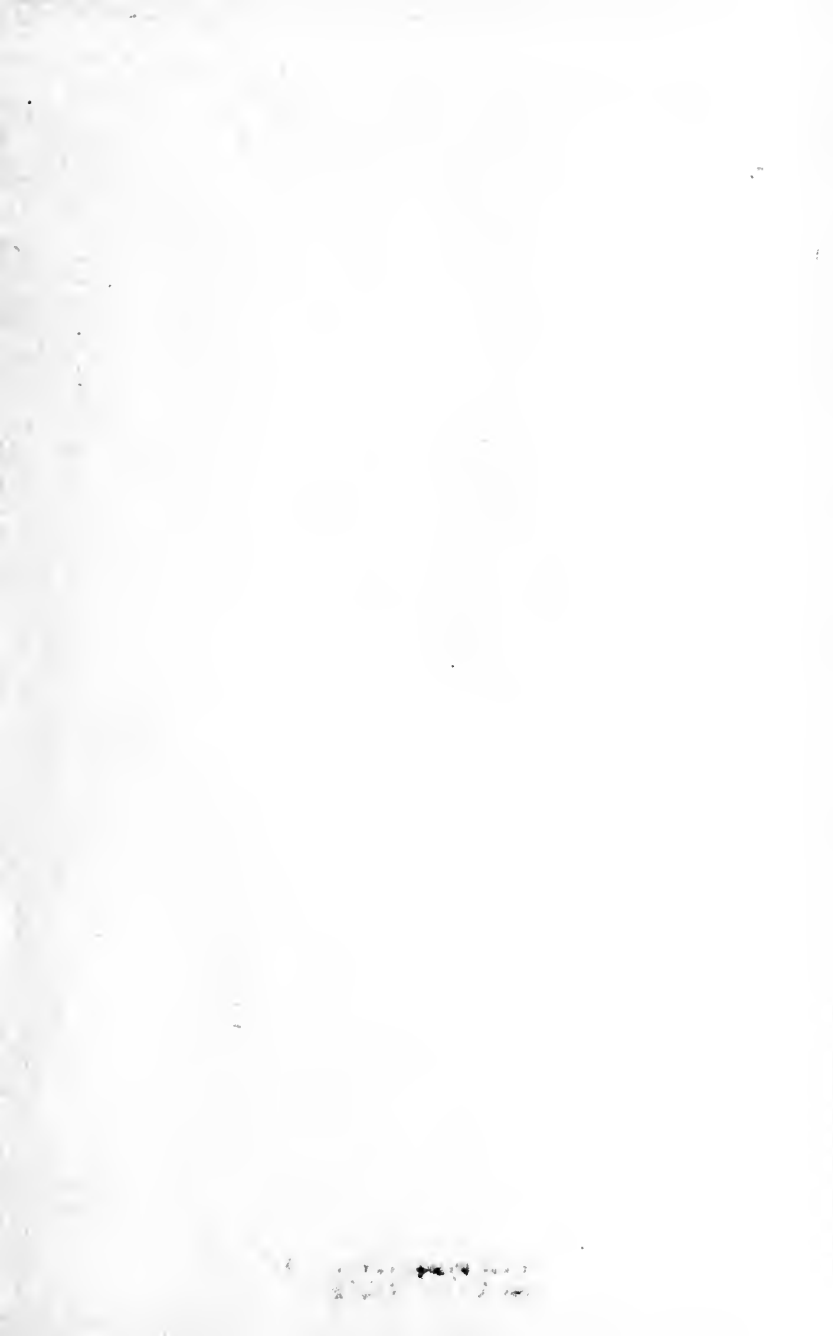
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"WATSIDE"

ST. JOHNSBURY, VERMONT

APRIL 10TH, 1919

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PART I

THE GREATER GLORY

CHAPTER I

IN WHICH WE CONSIDER PARIS, VERMONT AND OUR HOME FOLKS FROM THE STANDPOINT OF OUR NEWSPAPER OFFICE.

UP here in the center of Vermont in a valley enclosed by the virile summits of the Green Mountains, is the little New England town of Paris.

It is a neighborly state — a neighborly little town. It is lovingly known as “back east” to large numbers of Yankee folk who in their young manhood or womanhood have mistakenly left it to pursue fickle fortune in states afar. It is called “up north” by those southerners who know us only from our prominence in the weather reports or think of Vermont as open for travel a couple of months only in the summer time. As for the country at large, it thinks of us as a quiet little state, smelling mostly of new-mown hay and cow-barn, chiefly valuable to the union as a producer of turkeys for its Thanksgiving dinners, maple syrup for its breakfast pancakes or pretty school ma’ams for its western romances.

Once upon a time our town consisted merely of a few houses, two general stores, a printing office, a post-office, and a blacksmith shop, barnacled about a country crossroads.

Today Main Street is a thoroughfare two miles long with a mile of modern business blocks at one

end and an equal distance filled with pretentious residences at the other. Side streets have been laid out by enterprising real estate men; Main, Maple and Walnut streets have been paved with material on which our appropriate quota of Ford automobiles skid badly in wet weather. New structures have arisen where twenty years ago fat, sociable New England homesteads stood behind white rail fences, banked with hollyhocks and cinnamon roses.

On the main street of Paris, between the Odd Fellows' Hall and Edward Brothers' Cigar Store, dating back to the early days of the community, is a dingy brown building that has always housed a printing office. In this building during the past thirty-seven years, two men have been publishing a small-town evening newspaper. One of them is a kindly, grizzled philosopher by the name of Samuel P. Hod. The other is his partner, — the humble scribe who sits before a battered old exchange table recording this narrative.

It is a town landmark, this newspaper office of ours. Our sign

The Paris Daily Telegraph

is weather-beaten and the letters are well-nigh indistinguishable.

Inside these humble premises the furniture is barked and battered. Beneath the old pine counter lies the dust of years. An antiquated green box safe by the side window is piled high with wasted government money in the shape of Congressional Records and files of old correspondence which we do not know why we save yet which we cannot bring ourselves to throw away. The pigeon holes of the walnut desks are stuffed with memoranda and impedimenta, col-

lected there through many years, that we are always going to clean out some day when we can find the time.

Yet on those rainy days or those holidays when we do have the time and make noble start at the epochal renovation, we do not get far into the mass. For very soon we are sitting with faded yellow clippings dropped before us — letters of bygone days — perhaps here and there a once-used photograph of some familiar face, disappeared these many years. And our gaze is far away; there is a dull ache in our hearts; we cannot bring ourselves to the sacrilege of disturbing these mute testimonials of the cruel flight of time. We cannot consign to rubbish basket or furnace fire this litter which comes to us in these hours like voices and faces from the dead. Better indeed, to let the youngsters do it in those future years when we likewise shall be but a memory to this community and this office.

From this apparently systemless and cluttered place there is a door opening into a long, low-studded apartment in the rear. In a more pretentious plant it would be designated as the mechanical department. To us it is only the "back room." Here are laid out the chipped and battered imposing stones and racks of type-cases, even more abused than the business furniture out in front. The floor is worn and uneven and the knots in the old boards are in evidence. Floor cracks are pressed full of dirt and tiny types, swept there by careless boys through all the years that have slipped away.

Over in the southwest corner is our old linotype machine. It is wheezy and rheumatic, sure to lie down on us at the wrong time and some day to go to pieces like the wonderful one-horse shay. Finally,

in the opposite corner, surrounded by vicious ink-barrels with gobby sides and rolls of newsprint, is the Cox-Duplex press that has stood by us through the years like some faithful old animal. It has often been starved for oil, it is encrusted with dirt for want of care, but it has done its duty somehow, and we could no more bring ourselves to dispose of it and put in stereotyping machinery than we could bring ourselves to dispose of one of our children.

This is the home of our little country paper. It is far from being a pretty place. Yet we love it — we who have labored in it for over a quarter century. For in it we see in a thousand little ways reminders of the changes time has wrought — to ourselves, our profession, our town, our nation. We love it most, however, for the human associations it has meant to us in the daily routine of getting out our paper.

The career of the *Telegraph* began in the 'eighties. It is an eight-page, seven-column little paper, often poorly printed in the cold Vermont winters when the ink will not flow freely in the fountains of the press, or in the warm New England summers when the same material spreads far too copiously to suit the connoisseur of good printing or a pressman with a vocabulary surpassing any crass imitation in type. Its front page is given over to world news, telegraphed each noontime from Boston. Its inside pages chronicle, from day to day, month to month and year to year, the poorly-written stereotyped advertisements of our local merchants, bordering the daily summary of the activities of our home folk: births and marriages and deaths, little stories of social glory which from time to time descend on homes about our community; the meeting and parting of friends; business success or failure; illness and ac-

cident, petty felony and unspeakable tragedy, — all the sad gamut of human affairs from the bathotic to the sacred, with which the country newspaperman does business.

If you are one of those rare souls who find delight in the study of your fellow men, come and live and work awhile in the office of a little country paper. For in the office of such a paper in an American small town you will get down to the bedrock of human nature closer than you have ever reached before. All day long through the front office will filter the pathos and bathos of the lives of your kind in the form of news for your columns: births and marriages and deaths; inspiring stories of success, heartrending stories of failure; cheap snobbery masquerading as quality; noble aspirations, unrequited sacrifices, kindly return of good for evil. And in the back room you will find the printer folk, perhaps not so picturesque as they were yesteryear, but still very humanly interesting and each man and each woman with a story worth the telling.

In this intensely interesting and very human task of publishing this little country newspaper, there comes a time in each week when we view our work in perspective. It is the hour on Saturday afternoons when the distribution of the pay envelopes has been made and the labors of another seven days are ended. The boys and girls of the back room have gone. The whirring of the shafting that runs the big press is silent; the motors on the linotype have been shut off and the front office is no longer conscious of the faint clicking of matrices falling into endless lines of news. With the back room smelling of printing-ink, lubricating grease and linotype fumes like a lair of beasts, the plant rests for twenty-four hours. Then we who

are responsible for this newspaper, sit in the front office where we can see the crowds milling up and down Main Street with an occasional individual dropping in to pay his subscription or an advertising bill, and the thoughts that come to us are solemn.

We have completed another week. We have added six more numbers to the files which our children and our children's children will look back upon some day, perhaps in amusement, perhaps in soft sorrow. For another six times we have repeated to our little world the fleeting joys, the momentary successes, the simple and awful little tragedies that make up the daily life of our community and its people.

When we come to this reflectory time, being ordinary two-legged men and women ourselves in the office of our little local paper, we find ourselves unconsciously asking questions. We wonder why in some of the homes, the new babies have arrived; why it is that in our town there are young folks whose love affairs have not had a happy ending; why many of the young and the strong, whose futures seemed so promising, have been removed from their activities among us; while the aged, the crippled, the morally deficient, live wearily onward? Thinking of our own small rôle, we wonder if we have done right in printing certain items in our paper. We recall incidents which have occurred within the week. Some of them make us wish we had given more publicity to one good work and less to some other thing of minor value. We regret that we have hurt one person's feelings, although all unintentionally, and we are sorry we were so lenient with another who deserved far more censure than we meted to him.

Then when we are deepest in our spell of the blues, and when we have smoked a pipe or two by way of

adjusting our philosophy, it comes to us that there is a townful, a stateful, a nationful of men and women around us who perpetually ask these questions. All over this continent and this hemisphere are millions upon millions of ordinary folk who have these periods of mental depression and introspection.

But this is a strange thing about these ordinary folks. The fact that yet awhile there appears no answer does not shake their faith in the belief that they should do their best while the opportunity is theirs.

It may be raising a family of freckled-faced youngsters to become ordinarily good men and women. It may be paying for a home. It may be building a business which adds to the town's industries. It may be only in the hundred-and-one little tasks of a ten-hour, three-dollar day. But underneath the conscious endeavor is the effort to do the best possible.

So we of our newspaper office, looking at ourselves and the people of our community, have grown to take these Saturday afternoons more and more philosophically as we have gone onward week by week and year by year with our labors. When we finally lock the office and go home for the brief respite of the Sabbath day, we are forced to recognize that there is more of good in life than bad, more of success than failure, more of reward than unrequited struggle. I might say that our position and occupation in the community have made us optimists in spite of ourselves.

But now and then we of this country newspaper office take note of some exceptional person — some exceptional struggle — some exceptional success — experienced by some one in our village, it being the nature of our business to note such things. Oc-

asionally there comes a case where some one has done the almost impossible thing, made the almost inhuman sacrifice, achieved the almost improbable attainment. And these rare folk stand out in the high light.

Strange to relate, if we were to catalogue some of these, we would be forced to recognize that the majority of them have been women. What is more, judged by conventional standards, they have been quite average women. Some of them have come to our attention in the daily news grist filtering through our office for publication. Many of them have worked for us. And — we give credit where it is due — some of them have married these ordinary aggravating bewhiskered males who are responsible for this paper.

So it has come to us that it would not be out of place or character with the function we are supposed to fill in this community to speak of the achievements of these in a larger way than our paper warrants, that they may become as much of an incentive to those in the great world outside of our valley as they have been to those within.

For after all, ordinary, struggling, curious, hopeful, discontented, American folks are not half so much helped on their earthly way by preachment or precept as by the exposition of others of their kind who have been strong where they have been weak, who have succeeded where they have failed.

It is with these thoughts in mind, in this setting and this atmosphere, for these reasons, that I sit here before this old exchange table and begin the story of a woman's life.

The story of Mary Wood, to us in this newspaper office, is the frail, delicate, beautiful little history of

the love of a girl for a man and for the sons of that man which that girl bore him. Yet somehow, as we grow older and go down the hill of life and see the new children coming up and the marriages taking place and watch the friends and loved ones and acquaintances dropping by the wayside, the story of little Mary Wood resolves itself into a eulogy of the lives of all good women everywhere. And the hoped-for reward in the telling is that all good women everywhere may know while yet on this side the Valley of Shadows that we men folk — while often thoughtless and preoccupied with other things — do not always forget or fail to appreciate.

CHAPTER II

WE CONSIDER MRS. WHEELER, A VICTIM OF SELF-MADE CIRCUMSTANCES, AND GAIN OUR FIRST PICTURE OF MARY WOOD.

IF you should come to Paris, go eastward to the end of Main Street, and take the road over the Green River bridge and past Haystack Mountain, you would ultimately find yourself in rolling New England country — meadow, pasture and wood lot — with solitary farm homes barnacled against the rocky hillsides and dusty roads winding over the hills and far away. You would pass the Marshall Mill Pond Bottoms, colloquially known as the “flats.” You would traverse the Green Mountain Valley district and pass through Simonds’ Woods. After an hour’s drive through sumach thicket, deer bottom, spruce timber and roadside briar-bloom, you would leave the dilapidated McDermott lumber job behind you and ascend Cobb Hill.

Near the top of Cobb Hill on the right-hand side of the road, you would come to a weather-beaten old house now faded to a sun-blistered mustard brown. A crazy stone wall beneath a row of hoary, gnarled, unpruned maples divides the south dooryard from the highway.

No one lives in that old house at present. For a long time its rooms have been empty, its doors locked, its blinds drawn. The lilacs grow ragged and frowsy at the corners and are full of caterpillars.

The back yard is choked with caraway, yarrow and bastard raspberry with an added mixture of wild roses, syringas, blossomless hollyhocks, and coarse-grained rhubarb banked against the west wall of the house and ell. A well-sweep by the opposite fence has defied the years but beyond it lie the foundations and gray-timber ruins of some out-buildings that collapsed in the Shirkshire storm of two years ago. Photographers journey long distances to snap the place from different angles. It is the typical New England abandoned farm.

An abandoned farm indeed! There are many of them scattered through this section of Vermont. True, this particular place is not so dilapidated and abandoned as some others with their sashless windows and sunken roofs and fallen doors. But it is pathetic enough, especially to those who know the story of the place as we of the *Telegraph* office have come to know it.

The yard of the old place is picked up very clean. The haylofts in the old barn are empty. The place was stripped of nearly everything of value at the time of the auction when Mary Purse came to live in the village. Even the three-forked lightning rods on both gables of the house and on the front of the high barn were bought for old metal by a Jewish gentleman of our community who is somewhat of a connoisseur in old metal with a clandestine remeltable value. No, the place is abandoned indeed and stands on the little hilltop all alone, waiting the spark from the pipe of some tramp or a northern gale to carry it down to oblivion. Yet what has taken place in those naked lonely rooms — the unspeakable joys they have seen, the wordless griefs, the nameless sorrows — brings a warm glow about our hearts

and wells our eyes with tears, — and there is nothing maudlin in this frank confession either.

Probably we in our little country office know more about the kinship and inside history of every man, woman and child in our town than any one else, for that is our business. But we especially know more about this particular family, this abandoned farm, than any other native because it is literally tied up with the *Telegraph* office with ties of blood. We know there are times when thoughtless folk in our town drive the visitor and the stranger past the place of a summer afternoon, point their whips at it and remark: "That's the old Purse place, the home of an unfortunate family that finally summoned up gumption to amount to somethin'." But they say that because they cannot know the history of the family as we have seen it from the inside, from the night that Mary sat with her mother in the little room under the eaves, down to the present. For when we drive past, an affection for it arises within us as though we were one of the family ourselves, and the place meant father and mother and home.

Away back many years ago, before New England had discarded her well-sweeps for windmills and filtered water systems; before electric cars had come in; before the Sherman Act and the ten-cent magazine and the machine-gun, when Central Park was one of the attractions of New York, and all our newspapers were set in nonpareil by tramp printers who knew their Shakespeare as well as the high school girl of the present knows who is married in the movies, — the house was in its prime and very much occupied, and the windows were open, especially one window in the gable of the upper story.

It was a stuffy little bedroom up under the eaves. It smelled of weather-dried shingles and cedar chests and musty closets and old rag carpets. A cheap low-hung yellow bedstead with a ridiculously high headboard and a ridiculously low footboard and a bouquet of hideous brown flowers painted on both occupied the corner between the one south window and the west wall, squaring out into the room and leaving space only for a rocker and a bureau with a badly-flawed glass.

Time-discolored wall paper peeling in places, Sunday-school mottoes, small tintypes and photographs stuck in the sides of the cheap mirror, chairs and dresser and mantelshelf indicating feminine occupancy, — these things the light of the day might have disclosed. Now they showed dimly or in fantastic shadow, for it was late of a soft spring night, and the room was illumined by moonlight outlining a long white blotch upon the floor.

There were two people in this little room tucked away beneath the twisted old eaves. One was a girl of twenty years in a nightgown, sitting upon the bed with her back against the billowing pillows, her fair arms clasped about her knees, troubled eyes fixed upon the shadows. Near the head of the bed in the rocker sat the mother, a woman with terribly reddened hands. An elbow on the narrow sill supported the gnarled fingers as they pressed against her lips, and she stared wistfully out into the singing spring night. The other hand fumbled aimlessly, folding and refolding a pleat in the threadbare wrapper across her lap.

Mother and daughter had been for hours so, while the moon went higher and higher up the sky, and the world sank deeper and deeper into slumber.

A warm night breeze wafted the muslin curtains with which the one box window was hung. The town clock far over in North Foxboro tolled eleven lonesome strokes. Each time, in the rooms below, a similar clock added its fussy, absurd confirmation of the passing hours.

Her eyes fixed on the moonlit country spread out down the hill and away before her, the mother listened until the last stroke of both clocks had died away. Then she spoke in a husky whisper.

"In the story books, women folks in my fix would pack up their belongin's and leave. No self-respectin' woman'd stand for it, not in story books. But it's different in real life when their children are to be thought of, and when the place you're leavin' is the only home you got!"

Then silence again. Somewhere off in the hills a whippoorwill was singing.

"'Taint as if I had folks to go to," she went on. "And besides — besides — there's Artie. What could I do with Artie if I went? It's certain I couldn't go to work nowhere's and — take him with me."

The girl turned her face about and gazed up at the clear, high-riding moon.

"We could go together, mother," she said. "I could work, and you could help out."

"That's just what I don't want you should do, dearie, not yet. I want you should finish at the Academy and graduate, and know you got what's as good as a high-school education; I'll feel it was worth all the sacrifice. It's why I'm puttin' up with so much from him, him — your stepfather. I been hopin' almost against hope that he wouldn't find more'n his usual amount o' fault with you stayin'

around home and just helpin' me, until I could see you graduate. But after the way he's been talkin' the last few weeks, and especially after what he says to-night ——"

"Don't take on so over that, mother. After all, maybe leaving home won't kill me. Maybe it would be the best thing, seeing that staying around here keeps causing you so much trouble and abuse."

"But where'd you go, dearie? Out among strangers! I ain't got no folks and Amos's folks couldn't afford it even if they was so minded. You'd have to go into the world with only half a schoolin' and knowin' no business to support you."

"But if you should die suddenly, mother, I'd have to face it. And I got to face it sometime, anyway."

"Which ain't no reason why you should leave and miss your schooling so long as I'm alive and all it means is me standin' up for you!"

"It isn't fair for you to put it that way. It sounds as though my education was taking something out of you that I have no right to take." The girl's voice was tender.

"But you have, Mary girl. When you get to be a mother you'll realize how you don't begrudge havin' your children 'take things out o' you' that way."

"When I get married, mother, and have my own home ——" began the girl.

"Don't talk about it!" the mother broke in. "It hurts! Not because it'll mean losin' you who's nearer and dearer to me than any one else on earth, but because you don't understand what it means to be married. You just don't understand what the chances are you're takin'. You —— don't —— understand!"

"You mean, mother," corrected the girl, "I don't understand what the chances are I'd be taking if I married a man like Pa Wheeler. But if I married a man like my own father; if I were to be as happy as you claim you were in the one short year before my own father died, you wouldn't feel that way, would you, mother?"

The woman bit a quivering lip.

"There ain't often anybody as happy as I was that one year with your pa, Mary. And yet from my experiences with men folks since, I wonder if that happiness wasn't due more to his dyin' before the novelty o' livin' together wore off than because the match was so awfully perfect."

"You ought not to let yourself be as bitter as that, mother. It'll spoil your faith in everything."

"It has — almost, Mary. Yes, I'm bitter! And why shouldn't I be bitter? What chance has a woman got back here in this forsaken country? Tell me that — just tell me that! No matter how fine her ambitions or how badly she longs to better herself, tell me what chance she's got when the men folks ain't no better than you've seen round these parts since you was old enough to know about — things?"

The daughter remained silent.

"What chance has a farmer's wife got, anyhow?" the mother cried, all the sorrow of her heart in the tone of her voice. "We're born of poor folks off on some lonely weed-grown country road. We grow up with no society but goin' down to the general store or Sunday meeting or an occasional dance. We get what education we can at some white country schoolhouse taught by a girl who'd be in a place in some city school if she knew enough herself.

Then soon's we reach the place where we're a financial drag on our folks, the boys come courtin'."

"I know, mother, I know," sympathized the girl.

"They're boys same as their fathers was before 'em," went on the mother, "and same as their fathers was before them. They got no ambition. They don't know nothin' but farmin'. Their ideas o' bein' men and growed-up is chewin' tobacco, smokin' pipes, sayin' swear words and considerin' women folks as a possession to run a farm with like a plow or a horse. We marry 'em because we don't know what's in the world and feel flattered by their attentions. Or we become wives because it's disgraceful to be an old maid, or because we just have to get out into a home of our own, or because we ain't never met real men!"

"You're getting yourself all worked up, mother," declared the girl.

"We marry such as ask us, usually the first askin', and go off to lonely farms in the hills. Then quick enough the mask o' holy matrimony is stripped away! Life? It turns out just plain hard work, and sufferin' and goin' without things, bein' abused, stayin' alone, kept from havin' money to spend for ourselves, bearin' children, fightin' the silence till death or insanity comes as a blessin'." She choked a bit hysterically, and the girl put out her hand, but it had no effect.

"We have to have children when we don't want 'em," she cried, "and when our men folks want 'em less'n we do. We get up before daylight and through the long hours o' forenoon, afternoon, and into the night we slave with our work all cut out for years, years!—weary years, with no thanks, no praise, no money, no coöperation, just existence.

that's all, — just plain existence! Don't make no difference how much work we do, Mary, it don't get us nowhere; we just have to take what the men folks hand out and endure in silence, and if we buck up and run away from it all, we're bad women and lackin' character!"

"I know, mother, I know!"

"It's a hard, rough lot we got, Mary, with precious little at the end of it but a funeral in some village church, the lowerin' into a grave in some quiet hillside cemetery runnin' mostly to wild asters and rank grass and weeds. And the grass soon enough grows over our grave, and hides even our name, and the date on our headstone."

"Don't, mother!" the girl pleaded piteously, — "don't talk that way."

"I can't help talking that way. I been puttin' up with it, — just for your sake, Mary — so's maybe I could keep you from doin' what I have done. I married Pa Wheeler so's maybe I'd have a home and you'd have a home and maybe a father to help you. He was nice enough to me so long as I was only his housekeeper — you know that. I thought, o' course, it'd keep up after we was man and wife. I'd been so happy that one brief year with your father that I'd clean forgot my own mother's hard time. But just as soon as the new wore off, I see it was my mother's fix all over again. And for fourteen years I been standin' it. Artie come along — crippled like he is on account o' the way Pa Wheeler abused me 'fore he was born, and he's been a helpless whimpering burden that's kept me tied here enduring it all. The weeks has grown into months and months into years, and all my ambitions to make something out o' myself for my children — all my

likin' for pretty things, all my yearnin' for education myself — has all gone for nothin' but doin' the work peaceable to keep Pa's temper down, livin' for only you and Artie — for after all, I'm his mother — and hopin' to get you started right. And it's from goin' through with it and knowin' what it's like that I want to save you from it, Mary. It's why I feel hurt and afraid when you talk about the time when you'll be married. You don't know what it means, Mary. You just don't know what it means."

The girl answered sorrowfully :

"The world's awful unfair to some folks who don't deserve it, isn't it, mother?"

"Lots of older heads than yours and wiser heads than mine have made the same observation long ago and arrived at about the same conclusion!"

The girl watched the stars — millions and millions of stars — peaceful stars — twinkling stars — in the midnight sky — but stars that often mean only insanity to lonely farmers' wives exiled off in the country's great silent places. After a time, tears like chips of diamonds glinted in her eyes.

"It spoils all the dreams of the future to think that marrying means that, mother. There must be some good boys somewhere who grow up without looking on their wives that way."

"For your sake, Mary, I hope there is — I hope there is! But that brings us around to the subject we were talking about a few minutes ago — you can't marry them kind that are worth while, and gentlemen, while you're only a little country bumpkin that don't know nothin'. It's one of the reasons why I want you should finish at the Academy — get an education that'll bring you the proper boy, the right sort, with brains and education and am-

bitton — all o' which means courtesy and kindness. You got the natural good looks and the ability, Mary. You ain't been spoiled by no foolish notions. You can do it if you get the education."

Then for a long time it was quiet in the little bedroom. Somewhere down in the lilacs at the corner of the house a tramp cricket cheeped philosophically. In the lower pasture below the orchard, among the rushes bordering the swamp, the frogs were piping with a chorus that was hourly growing lighter as the night deepened. Their music had a melancholy that all the experiences that came to the girl in after life, and all the joy and all the success, could never entirely efface. Each springtime when the frogs began peeping, the memory returned of that little eaves bedroom and that moonlight night in June, back when she was nineteen-goin'-on-twenty and she waited with her mother the homecoming of "Silent" Wheeler from the McDermott job down the valley.

"Mother," she asked, "if it came to a choice between a poor man who'd treat you decently and love you or a rich man who'd see you got plenty of money but — not much else — which would you take?"

"I pray God I might never have to decide!"

"It isn't fair to answer so."

"There ain't no such thing as a poor man treating his women folks decent and loving them!" exclaimed the embittered woman. "I'm afraid, after all I been through, that I'd take my chances with the rich man." Her voice wavered. She leaned over and buried her face on her arms across the bed. "Oh, God! — God! — God!" she wept hysterically, "forgive me for sayin' it! God forgive me! But I

have stood so much, God — so much for such a long, long time! I guess at last I'm goin' crazy!"

"Mother, mother! You're not going crazy. Don't let yourself get all worked up like that. You're just feelin' badly because Pa told me to pack up my things and get out, to-night. You're sorrowful because he took your last month's egg money and went down to McDermott's to get drunk on instead of using his own."

"It ain't the loss of no egg money, dearie, although that's hard enough, seein' I was savin' up for to get you the muslin dress for the dance down to Christie's. It's the hopelessness of it — for me. You ain't made no fatal mistake yet. You ain't made no mistake and saddled yourself with debt and work and unhappiness and hopelessness for the future. There's the chance for you to meet the right kind o' boy with money and ambition and ability to get ahead and be happy with him. But there's no such relief for me. I'm just tied here — tied for life to a man that the neighbors say is half crazy — who takes my money and goes off to buy cheap rum that makes him come home and wreck things — tied here to a crippled boy that'd die if I didn't look after him every moment. It's having to give myself all the time as a peace offering trying to keep a home for my girl so's she can finish her education like other mother's girls and stand the poor chance o' bein' a lady. And I ask — what have I done to deserve it? It ain't fair, God — just ain't fair! I don't wonder why most farmers marry two or three times, wearin' out one woman after another like cattle and buryin' 'em —"

"Please, mother! Oh I wish I knew what to do! — What would remedy things! I wonder if

finishing at the Academy means so awfully much after all. I wonder if it's worth the price of staying here and enduring Pa Wheeler's abuses." She was silent for a few moments. Then she tried to laugh. "When I get married it won't be anything at all the way we both imagine. Maybe I'll meet some —"

"It's natural for you to look on the bright side, dearie. You're young and your nerve ain't broken; besides, that's your way. Me — I'm old and faded and washed out and discouraged. Look at my hands, Mary! See how hard and out o' shape and red-colored they are. I can remember when they were even whiter'n your'n. There was a time —"

The woman straightened up. She held up her hands before her. They looked like claws — the great knobs of gnarled knuckles were hideous in the moonlight.

"Don't, mother, don't!" cried the girl.

The moon went higher and higher up the sky. The piping of the frogs quieted to an occasional solitary note off down in the dark. The clock in the lonely tower over in North Foxboro sent twelve lonesome strokes over the sleeping countryside; a few moments later the cheap little clock belowstairs fussily corroborated the hour of midnight.

"Why doesn't he come?" sighed the woman. "If he's got to come home and make us all miserable, why don't he have it done with? What's keepin' him? He'll be sick for a week if he drinks enough to keep him away all night!"

"I thought a moment ago that I heard him!" answered the girl.

Silence again!

Far down the Cobb Hill road the figure of a man climbed unsteadily. He covered much unnecessary

ground. He stumbled much and cursed continually. Withal he made progress.

When he reached the house at the top of the hill on the right, he turned under the maples and into the yard.

Mother and daughter, waiting in the moonlit upper room, heard a curse come up from the yard. They heard a man's step on the rear porch floor. His heavy boot came down upon a loose board that settled back into its place with a bump. Then followed a fumbling at the string-mended screen door and the slap of the flimsy thing behind him. Next he fell over a chair in the kitchen. The girl had heard a repetition of all on countless nights. Yet this night she shivered with a nameless dread.

"If he'll only drop asleep in one o' the chairs!" prayed the wife.

Long ominous silence in the lower kitchen!

"I hope he isn't up to anything," whispered the daughter.

The mother drew a long breath for poise and strength. She arose and stood before the window, looking up at the clear-cut high riding moon and the myriad stars—up to the heavens where God is supposed to dwell.

"Holy matrimony!" she whispered. "Holy matrimony!" Then ashamed of her sarcasm: "Dear God," she prayed with sudden nobility, "—help me; give me the strength!—for the sake of my girl give me the strength—to go onward and do what I can and save her from makin' her mother's mistake."

The silence grew into minutes. The two in the upper chamber decided the man had fallen into a

drunken slumber. Then suddenly up from the bottom of the flight came the roar of his voice.

"Sarah!" he bellowed.

"Don't go down, mother!" cried the girl.

"I got to go down, dearie. If I don't, it'll only make him worse. And it ain't myself, — it's you and Artie I got to think of." She gathered the red-yarn shawl about her narrow shoulders as though for protection, and disappeared in the shadows of the narrow hallway. Straightening out on the bed, the girl buried her face in the soft pillows.

Once she heard her mother's shrill voice in protest, followed by a retort in burly bass. Only once! The speaking solitudes of the summer night were resolving into whispers. The moon was moving so far westward that the phosphorescent patch upon the bedroom floor was a contorted fantasy in one corner. Even the tramp cricket in the lilacs down below had grown tired like the frogs.

A quarter-hour the girl lay thinking, straining her ears to hear evidences of trouble below. Suddenly came a step upon the stairs.

She sat up in the bed, pulling the clothes to her white throat. The rays from a lighted lantern — weak, weird rays — showed down the hallway stairs. A second later a man entered her room.

He was a heavy-set, big-boned man in a black striped shirt and overalls that stunk of the cow barns. He wore long ragged moustaches and had flat jowls with a week's growth of characterless black beard. His features were coarse, with the eyes deeply sunken. They were large, round, ominous eyes. When the man was under the influence of liquor they smouldered with a fire of deadly green.

"Silent" Wheeler was the nickname by which

the town knew him. It was an appropriate nickname. During the day, as he met and mingled with his neighbors, he was laconic, taciturn, friendless. On summer nights he went down to McDermott's where he spent the hours getting morosely drunk. In the other three seasons he sat at home before the fire, nursing the poker, raising one of the covers and spitting from time to time with sharp hiss into the stove. In this manner passed hours and hours. When addressed by wife or stepdaughter he nodded or ignored them. Always he was thinking, thinking, thinking, — brooding over a wrong. The neighbors declared he was holding it against his wife for giving him a crippled idiot as his only son. But that was conjecture. At ten o'clock he would descend to the cellar for his porter. He drank it alone by lantern light in the musty regions belowstairs. Then he went to bed without speaking and snored through the hours. Weeks passed thus — always the brooding, brooding, brooding — always the watching of the movements of wife or stepdaughter with the baleful green eyes, always biding his time to set a great wrong right.

This man came into the girl's room carrying the lantern which the woman with the terrible reddened hands left burning each night in the kitchen to light him for his slug of porter. He set the lantern down upon a corner of the dresser where its greasy base marked a ring which ruined the delicate embroidery. Kicking the rocker out of the way, he moved toward the bed, the green eyes fixed ominously on the girl's white face.

"Pa!" she cried.

She shrank away from him, huddled down against the opposite wall, the bedclothing drawn to her throat.

“Pa! What is it you want?”

The stepfather stood unsteadily before her. Sensing the feel of an ugly knife in his coarse palm, force of habit prompted him to bring a plug of tobacco from his overalls pocket and cut himself a huge twisted chew.

“I want to know somethin’. I want to know how old you be?”

“Father! You know how old I am. I’m nineteen-going-on-twenty.”

“Yas! You’re nineteen-going-on-twenty. You’re nineteen-goin’-on-twenty! So I been thinkin’!”

His tone was ominous. He returned the plug and knife to his stinking clothes.

The girl was terrified by her mother’s absence and that the man was not intoxicated with the same effect as on other nights.

“Yas, you’re nineteen-goin’-on-twenty,” continued Silent Wheeler. “And I been thinkin’, I tell you, — I been thinkin.’ Tell me this: What ye ever done to help earn your livin’ or bring in money to support yourself or help the family?”

“But this is home — our home together. Does a girl have to earn money and pay board at home?”

“Don’t it cost money to support a female o’ your size, at home?”

“But I can’t work outside and go to the Academy at the same time. And I do so want to go to the Academy. I’ll be finished in another year.”

“Yas! And who pays your keep in the meantime?”

The girl knew that to answer would add fuel to the fires of wrath smoldering behind the strange green eyes.

“Tell me!” he roared suddenly.

“I — I — thought my own stepfather might —”

“That’s it! That’s it! Me! I thought so. And why should I? Tell me that? Are you my daughter? Are you?”

“I’m your stepdaughter.”

“Are you my daughter? Tell me that!”

“You married mother. Isn’t it the same?”

“I married your mother. But it ain’t the same. You heard what I said; it ain’t the same. I been thinkin’.”

“You never raised any question before about me staying here. I haven’t any other place — to go.”

“How about lookin’ after yourself? How about you makin’ some place?”

“I wanted to finish school first. I’ll be better equipped to — ”

“To what? You want education to prance ’round before your betters, that’s what you want. Did I have any education? Did your mother have any education? What right you got to expect us to support you while you’re learnin’ education so’s to prance ’round before your betters? Oh, I got this all thought out. For a long time I been turnin’ it over in my mind. For a long time I been thinkin’.”

“You married mother; and when you married her you knew she had me. It isn’t fair now to go back on — ”

“Who’s goin’ back on anything? Don’t give me no argument. Don’t try to down me with your education. I won’t be downed. I got this thing all thought out, I tell you. You was little when I married your mother, — little and helpless. You ain’t little no more. You’re able to take care o’ yourself. Yet you don’t make no effort to take care o’ yourself; you just laze around and wipe a few

dishes and do a little cookin' and mend a little clothes and do a few high-flown chores like you was some grand breed o' duchess; and think I ought to support you while you get an education to prance around and shame your betters. I'm sick of it. I stood it as long as I'm agoin' to stand it. So I — been — thinkin'!"

He had been thinking, for hundreds of terrible evenings!

"Father!" she cried hysterically.

"I don't mean I should do it no more!"

"Father!"

"I don't intend to do it no more. You heard what I said to-night. Why ain't you gone?"

"I didn't think you meant it. At least not so soon. Not at once, to-night!"

"Didn't think I meant it! She says — after all the thinkin' I've done — she didn't suppose I meant it! I told you to get out! I told you to get out! I meant it when I said get out. And I come home and find you here. You know what happens to willful young uns who disobey —!"

For a third time she uttered the word "Father!" but this time in a whisper. Then she tried to scream, but no scream would come.

The man was drunk. He was more than drunk, — he was mad. The lantern glint fell aslant on his face, and the girl caught the look in his eyes. They were the eyes of a person without reason.

She saw the green light blaze up. She saw the pupils dilate. She sensed that the worst had happened. The silence eternal of the lonely New England hillsides, the maddening quiet of the evenings, the lack of intercourse with people of education and breeding, the months and months of

brooding before the kitchen stove, — all had tended toward the inevitable. Something had snapped in Silent Wheeler's brain. Silent Wheeler had become obsessed.

The stepfather reached into his clothes. From around the top of his trousers he unbuckled a heavy belt.

"Don't, father, don't!" It was the voice of a little girl beseeching an irate parent to withhold punishment for some childish disobedience. Yet she was not a little girl. She was a woman grown and a ghastly pretty woman.

Silent Wheeler laughed. He had not laughed for so long and the levity was so uncanny that it paralyzed the daughter as much as the deadly thing he held in his hand. With the laugh he reached over. He closed his other hand around a soft white wrist.

The slumbering spring night was suddenly cut by screams!

CHAPTER III

SLUG TRUMAN, MONDAY-WASHING AND CARDINAL WOLSEY ENTER THE NARRATIVE AND START THEIR RÔLES AS MINOR HEROES.

DOWN Cobb Hill came the rattle of buggy tires in the sandy road. A trap drawn by a little black mare and driven by a stocky, well-dressed young man reached the maples alongside the Wheeler house. The stocky young man stopped the mare and arose in the vehicle. A hideous bulldog in the seat with him rose likewise.

Two times more those cries sounded on the summer night. The young man put a foot on the carriage wheel and leaped over. The dog tried the same thing and had to be extricated. The young man, followed by the dog, approached the house.

"Hey, you!" he called, "is anything especially the matter?"

For answer he heard a thump, a crash, a curse. The dim light that had been burning in that eaves room was suddenly extinguished. There was another thump, another crash — as of furniture falling. He heard a long cry. Some one came swiftly through the lower rooms. Then the light screen door on the side porch flew open; there came a flash of white in the moonlight and across the lawn toward him ran a girl.

"What's it all about?" the young man demanded.

For he had suddenly discovered himself with a protecting arm about this girl — a girl whose shoulders and body were enveloped in a heavy quilt and whose hair fell wildly about her face.

"Where can I go? — What can I do?" she sobbed.

At the moment the heavy footfalls of Silent Wheeler sounded through the lower rooms, and a bruised and disheveled man appeared on the rear porch. He started across.

"Wait a moment! Stop!" ordered the young stranger. "What's the meaning of all this, anyhow? Can't I ask a civil question and get a civil answer?"

"He struck me — with his belt — he struck me!" sobbed the girl.

"What for?"

"He told me to leave and go away. I didn't think he meant to-night. I was here when he came from McDermott's. And he struck me — with his belt!"

The heavy quilt slipped from her grasp. The moonlight disclosed the white flesh of her arms and shoulders. For a moment the young man gaped blankly.

"Cripes!" he ejaculated. "Cripes!" Then he turned on the stepfather. "I'm Slug Truman, I am! They call me that in Paris because I got a hundred-and-seventy-pound punch — I have. And if I hit you with the whole hundred and seventy, I might bust you right open. What's coming off here, anyhow? What's the row?"

"Strangers ain't wanted in this!" growled Silent Wheeler angrily.

"Maybe they ain't. Then I'll be the little old unwelcome guest. What's the matter with you,

Si Wheeler? You talk as if you'd gone plumb looney!"

"Strangers ain't wanted in this!" declared Wheeler again.

"But they ain't goin' to stand aside and see no women folks beat up!"

"You keep out!" warned the stepfather.

The girl uttered a little cry. She fancied she could see his strange eyes — green eyes — glowing and smouldering in the moonlight.

"Keep out nothin'! You keep off! Keep off — or seein' that just this minute I got this lady to sort o' keep standin' up, I might call in this dog to help me, don't you know!"

"To hell with your dog!"

"Don't say that. He ain't used to bein' spoke unkindly of."

But the man started forward. He made a lurch at the girl. The dog growled. The young stranger tried to get himself between man and girl. Wheeler's onslaught made him stumble.

"Sic 'em, Card!" the boy cried. "Help a feller out that's got a armful!"

The scruff of the dog's back arose. He ran around and around the group a couple of times, growling low and ominously. The man hit at the boy. The blow infuriated the animal. His jowls slobbered with sudden rage. He sprang. His teeth snapped.

In the next three minutes that yard witnessed a tragedy.

"Cripes!" Slug defended himself, "I had to ask Card to help me out, didn't I? I couldn't bust him with my arms full o' girl and bed quilt. What good is a dog, anyhow — unless he rises to a emergency?"

He led the fainting girl to an old berry crate that

helped clutter the yard and started in to disengage the powerful brute who was doing such terrible execution.

Silent Wheeler dragged himself back to the porch on hands and knees, where he collapsed and rolled down the steps. The dog who had tasted blood had to be kicked, cuffed and beaten into submission. Then Slug lifted him bodily, carried him to the buggy and tied him to the fancy iron under the seat in the rear. There the dog licked his wounds where the man had clawed him and growled continually while the scruff of his coat settled.

"Are you hurt, Miss?" Slug asked the girl.

"No! That is — not much. It isn't me I'm thinking of — it's mother. Oh, what's become of her?"

"As I was drivin' over the top of the hill about five minutes ago I see a woman runnin' in the moonlight across the south mowin'. I thought it was queer. You don't suppose it was her, do you?"

"Then she started for help to the Osgood's. It's the nearest way — across the south mowing."

"Whatter you want to do? You can't stay here like this!"

"I don't know. I could wait till the Osgood boys come."

"You better let me take you to the Osgood's — if you mean the Henry Osgoods. You can't go back in the house to-night. Besides, I don't know how bad Card's chewed the old man up. Sheriff Crumpett ought to be called right away quick."

She let him lead her to the buggy. He helped her in. She tucked the heavy quilt about her and he added a blanket. He got in over the opposite wheel, picked up the reins and pulled the beribboned whip

from its socket. The little mare was lashed into a wild gallop, and the rig careened off through the night.

It was four miles by the road to the Osgood's. Young Truman guided the foaming little mare into the Osgood's front yard and halted close to the steps, where she quivered and champed at the bit. The old Osgood house was dark and silent. Evidently the mother had not arrived, or lights would have been burning. Slug vaulted over the wheel, alighted on the piazza and hammered at the door with the butt of his whip.

The minutes ticked past. They waited. Slug hammered again. But though the noise he made sounded through the house like the summons of an enemy of invasion, no sign of life appeared within. A big black cat came around the corner. It leaped up the front steps, purring and mewling. It rubbed against Truman's ankles.

"Looks as if they ain't home," he announced.

Again and again he pounded. He went around to the side doors and made a similar racket. He called to the upper windows from the front yard.

"There ain't a window open anywhere," he announced. "They wouldn't sleep on a warm night like this with all their windows shut. Do you want me to take you back — or anywhere?"

He drove her back. A half hour later they turned into the Wheeler yard.

Silent Wheeler was gone from the porch steps.

Leaving the girl in the rig and prepared for trouble, the boy alighted and called through the darkened kitchen door. But he received no reply.

He found matches in one of his pockets. He broke one from the card, waited until it had burned up and then went boldly inside. The girl saw the

reflection of the flame travel through the lower rooms. In a minute he was back.

"There ain't any one here at all, Miss Wheeler. Your Ma is probably still off looking for help. Your dad has probably —"

"— gone down to McDermott's once more. And my name isn't Wheeler — it's Wood — Mary Wood."

"What do you want to do?"

As he waited for her to decide, he suddenly raised his head and listened.

"What's that?" he demanded sharply.

The girl listened likewise. Then her delicate lips grew hard.

"That's only Artie. He's my stepbrother. He's probably in his upstairs room."

Slug had heard of Silent Wheeler's crazy son. He did not refer to him again.

"You can't stay here," the Truman boy declared. "Your stepfather might come back and try to pull off more fireworks. You ought to go somewhere's and wait for morning. And I ought to go get Sheriff Crumpett. Old Wheeler belongs in jail after a night of this. You women folks can't trust yourselves to him again."

"I haven't any place I could go!" the girl broke down. "Not unless it was to one of the neighbors. And there aren't any besides the Osgoods that we know real well."

Slug came across to the rig. He stood by the rail looking up into the pretty features.

"Did he hurt you?" he asked gently.

"Not — much!"

"I ought to have left Card have him."

"The dog would have killed him."

"It would have served him right. It was lucky

I come along. I was just coming back from the dance to Gilbert Mills."

It was an inappropriate time for him to thrust himself into the situation with personal explanation. Beyond this brief declaration he said nothing. Only: "If you could get your things, I'd be glad to take you down to Paris — or somewhere. And you could leave a note for your mother, tellin' her you was all right and lettin' her know the place you'd gone. That is — if you want to go right now."

The girl sat thinking for a time.

"It's a good time for me to go," she said pathetically at last. "Mother will — come back all right — and if she finds my note, it will be better than a sad parting — bidding me good-by. I'll go quickly now — if you'll just take me to Paris."

The girl swayed as he helped her to the ground. She went inside. He sat down on the porch steps to guard her from further harm — and he waited.

At the end of half an hour she reappeared. She was dressed in a plain brown dress, a hat with a long black feather. She carried an old-fashioned telescope bag.

"I couldn't stay here another hour after this has happened," she said. "I've made trouble enough here. If you'll take me to Paris and I can fix it so to get work to-morrow, I'll pay you back for your trouble and transportation. You're Herbert Truman, aren't you? I've heard the girls at the Foxboro Center Academy speak of you."

"Yes," he replied.

He assisted her into the buggy again. He thumped the big dog to make him lie over and give room for the telescope bag. Then he climbed in beside the girl and unwound the reins from the whip.

"How about the note for your mother?" he asked.

"I wrote one. I left it pinned to the tablecloth in the dining room. I said I'd gone to Paris to get work and as soon as I'd got a place, I'd send and get her."

Slug said little more until they were nearly down to the Marshall-pond bottoms.

"I think you could get a job in the *Telegraph* office," said he. "I was looking over last night's paper to see who'd advertised to get work in the shop — Dad's shop — and I remember that Sam Hod and his partner wanted a couple of girls to learn typesetting. Think you would like typesetting?"

"I'd like anything," the girl said desperately, "that would save me from going back. You're very kind."

"Helping the ladies is my specialty," Slug declared. Then, sensing that his rejoinder had fallen exceedingly flat, he struck the little mare sharply with the reins and they rumbled through the covered bridge by Patterson's sawmill.

"Her name's Monday-Washin'," said Slug off-handedly. He meant the mare. But little Mary Wood was thinking about something else than the name applied to the horse.

CHAPTER IV

MARY WOOD "ACCEPTS A POSITION" IN OUR GRIMY NEWSPAPER OFFICE AT WHICH THE TOWN IS APPROPRIATELY HORRIFIED AND OSTRACIZES THE WOOD GIRL SOCIALLY.

"THERE'S a girl in the office wants a job!" announced Mr. Nimrod Briggs, compositor, returning to the back room with his fingers full of proofs.

I went into the front office. A girl in pitifully plain clothing and a pale, pretty face stood on the other side of the battered counter.

It was my first view of Mary Wood. Many years have passed since that far-off spring forenoon. I have seen Mary in many different places, under many cruel circumstances, resolutely facing many hard situations in life, mostly with a smile on her face. But as I saw her in that office that morning, she was the Mary Wood I have liked best to remember — before care and anxiety and struggle came to her — before love had levied its price, taken its pound of flesh from her heart and the soft bloom from her features — before disappointment and cruel suffering and noble effort had changed her from that gentle-faced blushing girl, surprised in the presence of strangers, into the typical American wife and mother.

And I remember Mary Wood that day, not so much for the soft brown hair parted on the fair high forehead, nor the lines of her graceful figure nor the

sweet, patient, frightened look deep in her dark eyes, but for the graceful way in which she came over and begged for work and the chance to earn a living for herself.

She got it!

Mary went to work for us immediately, "learning the case."

Sam got her a boarding place with one Mrs. Mathers, a widowed lady, who ran a boarding house on School Street.

The first few days slipped away; by Saturday she could get up a fairly sizable string of locals.

And she tried to "find herself" in our community.

It was something of a novelty in those days for women to be employed in printing offices. Our newspapers of those years were produced by journeymen printers, popularly known as "tramps." They were strange, lovable souls, more or less out of plumb with the world around them, who drifted from place to place, staying only long enough to earn the wherewithal to finance them further in their wanderlust. Most of them drank to excess. They could thoroughly be relied upon to demand employment when there was no more work than the regular staff could handle and with equal faithfulness they lay down on the job or moved onward just when work was burying the office and they were needed most.

It occasioned some talk in the village therefore when Sam Hod departed from the traditions of the profession and sought local girls to do his typesetting as being dependable, all-the-year-round work folk. This talk was revived when it became known that the Wood girl, after a humiliating experience with

a drunken stepfather at their lonely farmhouse on the Cobb Hill road, had secured a place and intended to pay her own way and care for herself by taking employment in the local newspaper office.

It was regarded as a rather radical procedure for her to take her place at the case alongside the flotsam and jetsam of human life who commonly lived off printing offices — and rub shoulders with them in the day's work. Conservative parents commented dubiously on the idea of a "nice" young lady overhearing the lumberous and oftentimes highly-hued talk circulating among employees of a printing establishment and taking up with the grimy, monotonous, back-room life which in those days was typical of newspaper offices the nation over. And as conservative fathers and mothers of "nice" daughters frequently discussed it when Mary Wood passed by, it followed that those "nice" daughters gradually came to acquire the same ideas and rated Mary accordingly.

It was a hard place in which to put the girl, the more so because she could not understand what lay at the bottom of the snubs and jellybean social ostracisms which occurred during that following autumn and winter.

She supposed — poor girl — that the lack of interest taken in her, the lack of companionship on the part of other girls about the village, the failure to receive invitations to parties and dances and village functions given by the younger set was due to the unsavory reputation which Silent Wheeler had in the community, that she was his stepdaughter and a girl who had come from "nobodies."

She laid it to her family; the fact that she had come from the inconsequential hamlet of North

Foxboro; that she could not afford to dress as some of the other village girls dressed and therefore offended those in a place to offer her social favors, — anything and everything but the truth.

It was a thoughtless and cruel little small-town snobbery. Happily the days of such provincialism are over. But the fact remains that Mary was not fortunate enough to "get in" with the "right people." She did her work in the daytime faithfully and satisfactorily. But when six o'clock came and the labor was done until another morning, she went alone to the cheap room at the top of Mrs. Mathers' boarding house and spent her evenings by herself.

Once or twice the men in the office made advances to her; tried to take her out and show her attention. But they were coarse, rough printer-folk, here to-day and gone to-morrow. She judged them intuitively at their true value and gave them no encouragement.

Yet the talk which her employment in the office occasioned among the "best" people was not match-flare alongside the commotion caused in the "back room" of our establishment to have a girl of Mary Woods' dainty personality working side by side with our men, appealing to them with her questions and trade perplexities, tickling their rough-shaven cheeks unintentionally with the truant strands of her fine-spun hair as she bent with them over the forms, getting little daubs of ink or type-case grime on her features and only making them the prettier.

If the town people could only have known, her presence in the office made a different place of the cluttered old room. It produced also startling changes in the moral tone of the establishment.

Old "Daddy Joe", the ad-man, stopped spitting tobacco juice on the floor and grinding it in with his boot. "Skinny Napoleon" Higgins, a lugubrious soul of exceeding thinness who had once been jilted by a widow, ceased his morbid recreation of setting up his own obituary in different styles and leaving it around on galleys which we always wanted in a hurry, he stopped sending out every afternoon for a pail of beer, he shaved three times a week and declared that swearing had to stop in that office, by Gawd, or he'd see to it that somebody had hell knocked out of 'em. The one-eyed boy whose given name was Lawrence Briggs Hanchett, but whom we called "Slob" because of his propensity to cover everything in the place but the payroll with ink whenever he filled the press fountains, ceased removing his glass eye and rolling it around the stove because it horrified the girls, and Mr. Nimrod Briggs who helped with the ads and tended press, buttoned his vest for the first time in years; he changed his shirt as often as twice a month and showed up for work so regularly on Monday mornings that the proprietors of the *Daily Telegraph* — noting that these changes had begun with the advent of the pretty little compositor — rose up and called her blessed.

There were three other girls in the office: Annie Seavers was the senior of these in point of employment — a big horse of a female with sloppy heels, receding chin and three rolls of fat on her neck under washed-out brown hair which would never stay combed. Annie "ran" with the River Street crowd, which was decidedly not a crowd for Mary at all, keeping up the traditions and popular conception of females who would work in printing offices.

Susie Whitcomb was the second; a conscientious little soul in gold spectacles which she wore half-way down a very freckled nose. But she was a slow-witted girl who lacked imagination, — always scented with cheap perfumery and clothed in home-made dresses with coarse stitches which were always parting somewhere about her anatomy.

The third girl — Mabel Henderson, more familiarly known as “Mibb” — was a black-eyed, independent young spitfire whose mother ran the mill boarding house at the east end of town. Mibb spent most of her wages on caramels and clothes and was always talking over the type cases about her “gentlemen friends.” Her father was a poor, overgrown, inconsequential soul who toiled not, neither did he spin, and who spent his days sitting around in grocery stores or blacksmith shops keeping folks informed about the progress of his old army trouble.

Between a mother with a caustic temper who was forever “telling the world” how she had thrown herself away marrying old Harvey Henderson, and a father who dined in the kitchen from scraps the boarders left — Mibb had grown up with rather unique ideas about the matrimonial relation.

“Harvey’s wife is a sort o’ female battleship,” quoth Uncle Joe Fodder, the town philosopher who ran the livery stable behind the Whitney House on Main Street, “and Harvey always reminds me of two or three hours o’ July afternoon. And when you get a battleship married to two or three hours o’ July afternoon, it ain’t reasonable to expect that the offspring’s goin’ to recite any phenomenal number o’ scripture verses at a Sunday-school entertainment. Some young folks know a lot about marriage by missin’ it to home. Show me a home

where the mother runs the bank account, and I'll show ye a bunch o' kids who usually don't rise up and give the old man a chair when he hoofs it in!"

This was the general attitude of the village toward the Hendersons. And yet there was one redeeming feature about the Henderson girl, because of which the village made due allowance for her "freshness." By one of those strange pranks which Nature often plays in a small town, the girl could sing.

Sing?

She had a contralto voice that Uncle Joe further remarked was "liquid glory" given her "to soothe the savage beast"—probably referring to "her old woman",—a beautiful voice that needed only training to make Mibb a prodigy. But it had not been trained for two reasons. Ma Henderson had no goods of this world to waste on such foolishness; and Mibb wouldn't have put the time into training if she had.

The girl sang at singing schools, parties, small-town entertainments. She abused her gift with all the abandon of the irreverent child of such parents, and used it only to create merriment for her associates with the popular songs and ballads of the period.

Neither with the Henderson girl, therefore, did Mary find much temperamental compatibility.

Many is the night that we elder folk in the front office, sensing the trouble but not knowing exactly how to go about applying a remedy, encountered Mary walking about the streets of Paris, with a little feeling of sorrow and sympathy.

Somehow she just didn't fit in with the various phases of the town's social life. She was too good for the workaday crowd in the shops and factories

of Paris as well as her fellow-employes in the mechanical department; and the balance of our people considered her beneath them and gave her small opportunity to convince them how thoughtless and wrong they were.

At first we had supposed that her mother was coming in off the farm to live with her; that indeed, would have been a happy solution to her loneliness. But the helpless idiot to whom she had given birth and who spent his days in a bare room on the second floor of the Wheeler house would have perished without her. While such an event might have been a mercy, mother-love held her to the unspeakable sacrifice. With Mary out of the way, temporarily the husband's personal abuse ceased.

Mrs. Wheeler said she guessed that after what she'd stood she could stand it a little longer, so long as it didn't get any worse. Besides, she didn't propose to go to no Paris and live on the slender wages of no daughter, not while she had the breath o' life in her body to look out for herself and she calculated she had. If Mary couldn't finish her schoolin' — if she had to go to work and take care of herself — she needed all the money she earned to buy herself clothes and pretty things and fit herself to attract "the right sort" in the matter of a husband.

It is not correct in this chapter of introduction of Mary to Paris to say that in the first lonely summer and autumn she was wholly ignored by the thoughtless boys and girls that made up our community's younger set. The night of the lawn party at Calvary Methodist church there was one young man who remembered her and asked her to go with him.

Poor "Slug" Truman! With all his faults and indiscretions he was a good-hearted boy and meant well. He too had been unfortunate in the choice of parents.

His father was old "Short-Cramp" Truman, so called because in an overgrown blacksmith shop down on River Street he "manufactured" a farm wagon of his own design with exceptionally small front wheels which gave his product a sale and tuppence worth of fame for its unique short turning qualities: also because, being a first-class mortgage forecloser and plate-passer, he was not above cramping unfortunates whenever he had the opportunity to execute such a maneuver to his financial advantage.

Herb's mother was a weak-eyed, whimpering-voiced, flat-faced woman with a hand like a damp dishcloth who never expressed an opinion in her life and spent her days following around and setting off a rather flashy and forward daughter, who made all decisions and saw that they were carried out.

Herb was a decent sort of chap and rather easy-going, and a natural sense of humor prevented him from reaching the extremes which finally landed Esmeralda Truman in the divorce court and a sanatorium. Old Short-Cramp might have been a leech and a sharper in business but he had lost a baby son the year before Herb came along and that made him partial and strangely indulgent to the offspring — particularly the male offspring — that had survived. Herb had all the money he wanted, but he spent it harmlessly though oftentimes foolishly, — on horses and dogs and the village belles, — whereas Esmeralda squandered hers viciously and lived to rue the day she was born.

Long before he had graduated from high school Herb had been a familiar sight on the streets of Paris with his little black mare, Monday-Washing, and his hideous big English bull with the equally incongruous title of Cardinal Wolsey. Herb stood six feet in his stockings and weighed two hundred pounds. He had the most tremendous cowlick in Paris, which Uncle Joe Fodder declared "had used up all the rest of the hair the Lord had left after he'd finished thatchin' the rest of mankind," which was a marvelous creation and immediately he removed his hat arose like a congregation of Sioux war feathers with a strong wind perpetually blowing from behind. When Amos Templeton, one of the barbers at Jim Stiles's barber shop went crazy one night and nearly scalped Doctor Johnson in the chair, the village declared his mental aberration was due to the struggle a few minutes before with Herb's cowlick in which he had been ignominiously defeated and brought down to the dust.

Old Short-Cramp's wealth was popularly assumed to be written in six figures; he was a sufferer from acute Bright's disease; when he passed on Herb would get most of his money. Therefore was Herb popular among the unmarried girls of the village and parents who winked an eye at the boy's proclivities for cigarettes, neat ankles and trim horses.

It was Herb who did not forget the little girl with the wistful brown eyes whom he had felt for one brief instant seeking protection within the hollow of his arm, and he intercepted her at the door of the boarding house one September night with some mummerly about having "two tickets give him" for the "ice-cream splurge" that he was unsuccessful in disposing of although he had proffered them

gratis far and wide. Would she help him make use of 'em as it was a pity they should go to waste and the Calvary Methodist ladies be profitters by an unearned thirty cents?

And Mary, with the color coming and going in her face because it was her first invitation "out" — as she wrote to her mother — had "thanked him ever so much" and said she would be pleased to assist him in making the Methodist ladies give full value for cash received. So she washed and ironed and strung with baby ribbon a poor cheap little muslin dress made by the woman with terribly reddened hands and on that memorable Thursday night "accompanied" Herb to the sociable.

Adam McQuarry, janitor of the Calvary Methodist church, was a simple creature with big ears and bigger feet who couldn't see why folks couldn't hold their lawn parties indoors and minimize the destruction to church property attending the removal of church furniture to the open air for social purposes, to say nothing of saving his velvet lawn.

During the afternoon Adam had stretched a wire from tree to tree in front of the church while little Mrs. Pratt followed him anxiously about and steadied his stepladder under the conviction that Adam turned loose unattended on a church lawn with a wild and rambunctious stepladder would surely break his neck and cast a shadow over the function.

At six o'clock the church lawn was bobbing with bulbous decorations of weird shape and gala hue; tables, chairs and vestry crockery had been spilled out onto the green, amid which a dozen ladies in "white things" starched as stiff as their religion, were effecting some kind of order and utility. The Sunday-school piano had been brought out by the

combined effort of Adam, a passing grocer's boy, and "Doctor" Dodd the minister, all of them morally assisted by the ladies, without knocking the varnish off more than four corners of that melodious piece of machinery or lowering it unexpectedly on more than two of Adam McQuarry's feet.

The ice-cream freezers were lined along the eastern wall of the church behind an improvised plank table and looked like huge moist shells waiting to be exploded on the social battlefield.

The entire neighborhood, Protestant, Catholic, Jew or pagan, had loaned something to the executive committee which it was positive it was never to see again, for the way things get lost or mixed up or carried off at these lawn-party and church affairs was a caution.

At seven o'clock the artists who were to furnish the evening's literary and musical entertainment had arrived and were tinkling at the piano or running over scales or thumping stringed instruments or wildly dispatching reluctant messengers for music which had been forgotten.

At seven-thirty the church people began to arrive in knots of twos and threes and fives, the men dressed with the painful laboriousness of horny-handed sons of toil and the women indicating the five-dollars' worth of fuss through which they had gone to be present and consume ten cents' worth of ice cream.

At eight o'clock Adam got loose with his stepladder and lighted all the bobbing, bulbous Japanese lanterns, and so long as Mrs. Pratt was busy elsewhere and didn't see him, whether he fell off and broke his neck or set himself afire with the taper was nobody's concern but his own.

The lawn of Calvary Methodist church became a

fantastic, romantic place where harsh faces softened and thin ladies became less scrawny and fat ladies became merely plump and homely girls became pretty and pretty girls prettier. Figures in white moved about among the tables from which arose the sociable hum of animated small-town "conversation" and the tinkle of tableware and spoons. And the ice cream was not the flat, starchy, patented quick-process stuff bought in these latter days from a public caterer and sold at a profit which is the obtaining of money under false pretences. It was great yellow rich scoops of frozen deliciousness made with real cream, — and eggs that weighed eight to the pound. A plateful was a meal and two plates full a hurry call on the castor-oil commissary.

Mary accompanied Slug to the ice-cream social and entertainment and found a corner with him not far from the piano where was a "table for two", and she sat and dissipated in a dish which she had grown up to recognize as sacred to occasions of great ceremony.

The boy tried introducing her to girls who passed them or waited on the tables. But it was an awkward, painful proceeding and after two attempts he gave it up. None of them lingered. They acknowledged the introduction with a quick "pleez-tomeecher" and were gone on errands of an extremely urgent nature.

"Ain't much society around here to-night," apologized Herbert. "As old man Fodder says, it's principally giggle, garble, gobble and git! Anyhow, there's the entertainment and if it ain't worth fifteen-cents we'll take it out on Adam McQuarry." Thinking this a good joke, Herb laughed and pulled off his hat, and his cowlick arose as though in aston-

ishment to find itself at a church lawn party, and Mary was obliged to laugh also, though not at Herb's pleasantries.

The entertainment began at eight-thirty with a prayer by the minister, — although whether to invoke a blessing on the artists or compassion on the audience was not made clear by the text. Then Doctor Dodd announced that the first number on the program would be a duet by the Rathburn Twins from Chopin (he pronounced it "choppin") and the two terrifically starched and stiffly braided little Rathburn girls were headed toward the piano and pushed forward. They climbed on two stools facing a piece of music as large as themselves and after several audible "one-two-three" "one-two-three" became launched on the rendition of so-called music in a manner which quickly demonstrated that Doctor Dodd had not been so very far wrong in his pronunciation of the name after all. Uncle Joe Fodder in the office next day declared that whenever he saw those musical but diminutive Rathburn Twins high on stools before some philosophical long-suffering piano they reminded him of a couple of painters slung on a staging half-way down the sides of a three-story building hurrying to finish the job before their paint gave out.

It was Uncle Joe's favorite joke.

One of the Twins having finished the duet not more than four bars ahead of the other and having to play "The Storm" as an encore because the Twin's mother constantly embraced such opportunities to call public attention to their capacity for "expression" (in which she was tremendously successful although not in just the way she intended), Doctor Dodd declared that they would next be favored with

an instrumental selection from Master Robert Bowen.

“Master” Robert Bowen, consisting mostly of Windsor tie, knees like gourds and manifest stage fright — who in other times and seasons was more popularly referred to as “that lanky Bowen young one” — pulled up his stockings with a subconscious jerk, wiped his nose with the back of his hand and followed Grace Rawlins to the piano. Thereupon he proceeded, as Uncle Joe also commented, to “murder Old Black Joe with a fiddle got with soap-wrappers.”

Esmeralda Truman, whose latest brainstorm was a career on the stage—next recited — as Doctor Dodd announced it “Curfew Shall Not Ring To-night With Piano Accompaniment.” And when she showed her hands “all torn and bleeding” and struck a rather hysterical pitch when Cromwell arrived and announced that her lover lived and could resume his job in the morning, Uncle Joe Fodder couldn’t stand the entertainment a moment longer but stamped off down to the Whitney House bar and had a strong drink.

Jerry Peterson who worked in the wagon shop did some sleight-of-hand tricks that fooled everybody but the small boys, and Clarence Potherton appeared in blackface and had a good deal to say about the train that went to Morrow to-morrow but got all tangled up in his time of departure and destination and did three-quarters of the song in a manner which suggested that his mouth was filled with hot potatoes.

Julian Blackburn told a few jokes about the baby brother that couldn’t be sent back to heaven because he’d been used four days and about Irish widow ladies who had the news of their bereavements broken to them in strange and wonderful ways. And

Douglas MacMillan appeared on the scene in Scottish kilts with a couple of cavalry swords and did the Sword Dance, his younger brother improvising a Scottish bagpipe out of his nose, while several elderly ladies turned their faces away and said the very idea to let Douglas come into a church entertainment in his bare legs like that and why didn't some one send him home to put on his pants?

The entertainment was concluded with the singing of "America," — Mibb Henderson with her rich but abused contralto taking the verses as solos and the audience joining in on the chorus. The young ladies took the soprano, the elderly ladies took the alto, the young men took the tenor, and the old men took anything they could get.

The parents then called noisy children from their fellowship on the church steps, or lifted phenomenal infants who had slept through it all, from their laps and started toward home.

Several good souls rolled up their sleeves and pinned on borrowed aprons and tackled the pile of dishes, looking for their reward in heaven. Lovers paired off and dissolved quietly into moonlit streets and under sleeping maples. Adam McQuarry blew out all the lanterns that hadn't caught fire and proceeded to "cart all the junk indoors, because it looked like rain before morning and the table tops might warp."

And through the entertainment, with half a plate of ice cream unconsumed before her, little Mary Wood sat apart with Herb Truman and thought how this indeed was life, and of her mother at a moonlit window far away on Cobb Hill too weary and heart-heavy to seek her bed.

Herb got to his feet, found his hat under the table,

effectively squelched the riotous cowlick and murmured something about how he hoped he could see her safe home. And they casually moved off the lawn with the others and found themselves in deserted summer streets where the young man regaled her with items of interest wherein his own eccentricities were prominent.

He asked her if she supposed the little black mare, Monday-Washing, could possibly contract shoe boil, and when she said she couldn't imagine such a thing, he declared that Monday-Washing had done that thing and explained in great detail how Doc Sawyer the veterinary had lanced it and taken away a "quart" and could she suppose you could take away a "quart" from the leg of a mare as small and neat as Monday-Washing.

Mary replied rather faintly that she could not conceive of such a happening which prompted Slug to move on to the subject of glanders.

Had she ever had a horse with glanders? No? Well, did she know what to do if she should have a horse with glanders? No? Well, he would tell her so that she might be prepared for such an emergency and save the animal from the death-violent at the hands of the authorities. Which he did, with much elaboration of the price the secret had cost him and the intimation that he was disclosing it only because he took it she was a friend and could be trusted.

He confided to her that Jim Stile's collie dog had mange and that nothing would tickle him more than to know that Jim's dog had given it to fussy little Miss Sparrow's curly-tailed pug. He said that if Frank Morrow persisted in running his bay so fast between here and Barre that he was going to break her wind and wanted to know which she would pre-

fer : a mare with broken wind or a horse with spavin ? Finding at length however, that Mary was not prolific on the ailments of horses and dogs, he changed to athletics.

The longest way round being the shortest way home, they did not turn in at Mrs. Mather's gate when they reached School Street. Slug said something about a fine night and would she walk down as far as the water-works and back to enjoy it ? And Mary — because he was the first young man who had taken interest in her since she arrived in Paris — consented and with hat in hand wandered with him down Main Street and through Pine and off to the south of town.

Slug grew intimate on the return. At Clark Street he put his hand under her arm to help her over the broken crosswalk and on the other side he did not take it away. She was rather glad they were headed homeward. He got around in a conversational way to family affairs, among which he confided to her that most of the time his sister Esmeralda gave him a pain in the neck anyhow and that all she needed was someone to marry her that would whale the tar out of her.

He said that his mother had long ago impressed it upon him that he ought to marry and settle down, but that he said to her he'd be damned if he would until the right girl came along, all the girls in the village being more or less lightheaded sisters who couldn't boil water without burning it and a hundred to one would try to cook a chicken without removing the feathers.

He asked her if she ever had moments when the feeling came over her that all folks cared about her was for her money or what they could get out of her

and sustained a rather suggestive pressure on her arm when he asked her if love wasn't the real true thing in life after all and what could you find to equal it?

It was a badly disquieted girl who saw the white fence of Mrs. Mathers' house come in sight a second time, feeling herself in a situation beyond her control.

They stood for a while at the gate post, the girl leaning back against it with her bonnet behind her, gazing from time to time a bit fearfully up into the young man's face.

"Well," said he, "I hope you had a pleasant evenin'."

"Yes," she faltered.

"Hope we'll see more of each other."

"I hope so."

"Well, I suppose I got to say good-by."

"Good-by. I've had an awful good time. I can't tell you how grateful I am to you."

Before she realized what he intended there was an elephantine arm upon her neck, the faint reek of stale cigar smoke in her senses and a dab of a kiss had been imprinted upon the side of her half-parted lips.

Her face burned. There came a choke in her throat. She raised the back of one hand to her mouth and held it there. Her eyes fused tears of mortification.

"How — how — could you?" she lisped faintly.

"I didn't mean nothin' by it," he laughed uneasily. "Aw, come back! All the girls in our set lemme kiss 'em when I see 'em safe home——"

"How — could you?" she said again. "And I thought you were a gentleman."

"I am a gentleman!"

But she went swiftly up the steps and into the house.

CHAPTER V

IN WHICH A RATHER BORED BUT INDUSTRIOUS
SMALL-TOWN DEVIL TAKES OUR LITTLE JELLY-
BEAN HEROINE UP ONTO A MOUNTAIN TOP AND
SHOWS HER THE KINGDOMS OF THE WORLD.

SUMMER faded. Dreamy days of russet and gold followed. Over the eastern wooded hills loitered a harvest moon. There were husking bees and corn roasts out among the farmer folk. In the tangled woodlands songs of winter fires were ariipple in the sear brown leaves. In the west appeared low-lying cloudbanks and the leaden grays of November were upon us.

One Saturday morning toward the close of Indian summer the office mail contained a letter for Mary. Running her eye down the single sheet and noting the signature, the pallor fled and a dull red took its place.

It was a letter from Herbert and contained the following chatter :

“ — I was fresh, too darned fresh. All summer you been keeping away from me and avoiding me and you taught me a lesson. I’m sorry and I apologize. It won’t ever happen again. It’s come to me that you’re just the kind of girl I been waiting for ; a girl who wouldn’t let me get fresh.

“I mean this. I want you to forgive me. Show me

you accept my apology by going to ride with me to-morrow behind Monday-Washing out Gilbert's Mills way. If you'd done something you were sorry for and asked forgiveness, you'd want to be taken in the same spirit you apologize in, wouldn't you? Then be ready and come with me around one o'clock ——"

She saw him across the street when she came out of the office later that night. She went deliberately over and intercepted him.

"I got your letter," she said, "I'm sorry."

"You'll go buggy-ridin' with me to-morrow?"

"Yes."

He called for her at Mrs. Mathers after Sunday dinner next day. All the inmates of the boarding house watched them drive away. Mrs. Mathers went around all the rest of the afternoon looking troubled.

It was a lazy autumn day. The sun was warm, the fields were fragrant with stubble over which blew a fitful wind. Barrels stood beneath apple trees; ladders leaned against yellow-leaved boughs. The horizons were hazy. Autumn's mysterious voices were calling as they have called since the world was young.

They drove out of town by the south road. The hills hid Paris behind them. The little mare shied at boulders and old newspapers fluttering against roadside bushes. The New England country rolled away until it was blurred in a violet skyline.

For several miles there was a silence between them. Then Herb said:

"Thank you for forgivin' me; girls in this town as a rule are too fresh anyhow!"

"Let's not talk about that. I see by a local I

'set up' on Friday that your sister has gone to New York."

"Thinks she's goin' on the stage. She's just like all the rest. Makes me sick."

Mary tried again.

"I see the Odd Fellows are going to give a play in the Opera House. You're an Odd Fellow, aren't you?"

"Yes," he replied curtly. "But I don't want to talk about that. I want to talk about — about — something else."

"You promised in your letter that — nothing would ever happen —"

"But I'm honest in what I've got to say to you. I've thought lots about the lawn party and our walk — home. Do you know, you're the first girl in this town who's ever let me talk with her about horses and dogs and sports and such?"

"Yes?"

"And a girl that's interested in the things a man is interested in, is bound to prove interesting to the man them things interest."

"You'll get twisted up in your tongue if you attempt many sentences like that." Yet despite her laugh, Mary was uneasy.

"I'm serious."

She sobered. The man's declaration was an appeal. Regardless of his size and awkwardness he suddenly showed himself to her as nothing but a lonely, heartsick, unmothered boy. That was why he had apologized to her — perhaps. A queer feeling of wanting to do something maternal came over her.

"Let me keep company with you — this winter," he asked.

She sensed again that the situation was engulfing

her. To keep company with her? What lay at the end of such an experience, — what but marriage or a broken love affair? For there were no “friendships” among the younger set in those days that have since come to be. To keep company with a girl, to be seen constantly in public with her, to visit her regularly on Wednesday evenings was tantamount to an engagement. If honorable the end was matrimony. And as she rode along in the light buggy with the delightfully easy springs behind the neat little mare, over the autumn hills and far away beside the stocky young man with the idiotic pompadour and lumberous manners, she tried to conceive of herself as married to young Truman. And at the conception there stirred in her heart a little protest. And yet — what would her mother say if she knew that a young man with a fortune was at the moment taking her out riding and asking her to enter a relation which unfailingly led to matrimony — that this was happening and that in the daughter’s heart was disappointment and resentment?

“What — what would your folks say to any such arrangement?” the girl demanded after another mile.

“Oh — we’d keep it quiet. They’d kick like steers probably, but we’d keep it quiet. We’d just slip away somewhere on the sly and be ——”

“What!”

He took out the whip and slashed the little mare cruelly, effecting to “train” her when there was not the least reason for training her at all.

“I always put my foot in it!” he complained. “I’m a great big lummo, I am, and I wish — I wish I was dead!”

“You mustn’t wish that. It’s wicked!”

“But haven’t you ever felt blue and lonesome and

as if nothin' you did was worth while, and nobody gave a darn for you, and if you didn't have money you'd be the least among all the people in the world ——?"

"I've been blue and lonesome, yes. I've often felt as if nothing I had accomplished was worth while. But I don't know about folks caring for me only for money. You see, I never had money — to bother me — that way — that is — much!"

"That's so! But you can imagine ——"

"Yes."

"I knew you could. You're that kind. Did you know there's lots of girls in Paris that'd like to be out here with me havin' me talk to 'em like this."

"Maybe so. But you see ——"

"Well, — what?"

"You're—asking me so much—so suddenly——"

"I know all about that. It don't make me feel no better to realize it."

"Please, please! Let's talk about something else. Let me think!"

It was eight o'clock when they drove into the village from the east. Most of the towns folk were in church; from behind stained glass windows organ music carried out on the spicy autumn night the tunes of beautiful old hymns.

"I wish you'd come in and meet my folks," said Herb. They were opposite the big white house with the only plate-glass windows in Paris, surrounded by the aristocratic iron fence and with the terra-cotta statue in the center of the leaf-choked front yard. Monday-Washing was making urgent appeals to turn in at the driveway. She offered no protest as the boy gave the little mare the reins and she stopped before the side door.

She waited a moment on the brown-stone steps while Herbert hurriedly unharnessed the mare, blanketed her, fed her and pushed the buggy out of the way in the carriage house. Then he took her arm and they passed into his home together.

The girl had never before been in such a house. In books and magazines she had read of them and tried to picture what they were like. Now that she found herself in the big hall with her poorly shod little feet sinking into rich carpets and the atmosphere of rich embroideries and hangings assailing her, she was awed and frightened.

The lad helped her off with her coat and hung it on the big black walnut hall-tree. He led her into the southeastern front room and left her while he went in search of his mother.

Whatever his parsimony might be in business, old Short-Cramp was a home man and his house was his castle furnished according to his means. A marble mantel was built on the north side of the room with an open fireplace beneath. The fall night being chilly, a fire had been burning in the grate and the charred embers were warm and hospitable. The carpet was similiar to floor coverings in the hall and the high windows were hung with heavy curtains of creamy lace. The chairs were upholstered in gray. Over the carved center table was a chandelier of a hundred spangles and the big oil lamp in the center sent out an illumination which blended the whole into an air of unutterable luxury.

The girl sank into one of the chairs drawn before the dying fire. Something deep within her stirred in appreciation and compatibility with the atmosphere about her.

To live in a house like this was what it meant to be

wealthy. This is what her mother had wanted. To gain an entrance to such a life was the reason that she had tried to finish her schooling that had been so unhappily interrupted. She thought of the lonely farmhouse on the Cobb Hill road in contrast, and she choked back an impulse to shed tears. The avenue was open to her to spend all the rest of her days in such a mansion. And after all, Slug wasn't such an impossible boy. He was only big and clumsy and lonesome and heart-hungry. He would never treat her as Pa Wheeler had treated her mother. He wasn't that kind. What should she do? She had no one to help her or take counsel with her. She knew well enough what her mother would say. And with thoughts of her mother came the realization of what she could do for the woman with the terribly reddened hands if as Herb's wife she had access to the Truman money. She wept — a little bit — before Herbert returned.

"Neither mother nor father are in the house," he announced. "I suppose they've stepped out to Sunday meetin'."

"I'm sorry," she said. "Some other time, perhaps —"

"Don't go," he pleaded.

"I must," she said simply.

Rather sorrowfully he assented. He followed her back into the hall and helped her with her coat.

"Mary," he said "—— I don't mean nothin' wrong by what I been tellin' you this afternoon."

"I know you don't, Herbert."

She stood by the door, her fingers fumbling the rim of her bonnet, her face downcast.

"I'd like to keep company with you — regular —"

"Let me — please let me — think it over."

"All right," he agreed. His agreement was pathetic.

The luxury and refinement of the place she was leaving was speaking to her. Outside was the dull gray night with the strange mysterious heart-cries of autumn. The thought of her own hard life up to the moment, her mother's sacrifice and present predicament, the uncertainty of the future, the work and struggle and worry, all arose before her and confused and unbalanced her.

Courteously Herbert opened the big front door and stood aside for her to precede him. His desire to please her, to do the correct and gentlemanly thing, overwhelmed her.

"Herbert," she said in a voice she scarcely recognized as her own.

"Yes, Mary."

"You can kiss me — if you want to!" she offered softly.

The humble scribe who sits here in the corner of this grimy little newspaper office recording this narrative, entered the back room unnoticed the next noontime, — entered to find little Mary Wood with her head down on her type case by the window weeping with no one to see. Daddy Joe, fatherly old tramp printer, was in the next ad-alley.

The girl suddenly raised her head. She turned and looked out of the window, down Cross Street and beyond the town to the brown hills awaiting the winter.

"Daddy Joe," said the girl, "tell me; is it real wrong for a girl to want to marry money?"

Joe did not know she had been weeping. In a voice soft and sympathetic he replied across the cases:

"Suppose you tell an old man the circumstances, honey."

"Oh there aren't hardly any circumstances, Joe. Only I'm just tired, that's all. I'm tired of living in a boarding-house bedroom all alone. I'm tired of getting up at the unfeeling bang of a cheap alarm-clock every morning. I'm tired of having no one to talk to at night, no one who cares about me for myself alone. I'm weary of making endless motions, setting endless galleys, correcting endless proofs, drawing my pay envelope every Saturday that's spent before I get it — for board, for clothes — for the help of mother out on the farm. Sometimes I feel just as if I'd like some man — any man — to come along with about a billion dollars and pick me up and carry me off and do anything he wants with me, so long as he'll only take away the endless grind; so long as he'll just provide me with pretty clothes and proper food and a few good times and just let me — rest. Yes, I'm wondering if it's sinful to want to marry any man for his money."

Now those are dangerous sentiments from an honest pretty girl. Daddy Joe saw in a moment that it wasn't money the girl craved. It was love. For as I heard him tell her that day, "when folks is in love they don't give a hoot 'bout making no endless motions or payin' board or gettin' up every morning to the bang o' a cheap alarm clock." Fatherly old Joe, whom we found out afterward had buried a wife and two children, saw that the girl was tired, friendless and alone; that it depended upon him to keep her feet in pathways that were straight.

"Yes, Mary," he went on, "it's downright wicked to want to splice up for cash when you just ain't swept off your feet with hell-bent-for-election adora-

tion for somebody. What you need is for some nice young chap to come along and get you interested in him. Ain't you got no steady, Mary?"

"No," said the girl.

"Then just you hang on, Mary," said the kind old fellow. "The right boy's on his way along. You'll meet him sooner or later and when he comes you won't have to be told. And you don't want to go spoilin' things by havin' him find you the wife of some other fellow just because there was money-bags figgered in it. You want to be free to marry that young chap in a world all pink and gold with happiness. And you'll have a nice home and all your troubles will be forgotten."

The old man cheered the girl and she dried her tears and went on with her string of locals. But as he bent over his stick I saw him sadly shaking his world-wise old head — like Mrs. Mathers.

CHAPTER VI

ENTER THE ONLY HERO THIS HEROLESS STORY WILL EVER KNOW

THE week following Christmas, two things happened: First, the *North Sidney Bulletin*, a little weekly newspaper up in the northern part of the State, failed for several thousand more dollars than it was worth and was duly eulogized by the Vermont newspaper fraternity. Old Joshua Purse, who was ill of pneumonia at the time the creditors petitioned the court for a referee, passed away two days later and the newspaper folk of the State wondered what was going to become of his boy John who had been associated with him in the business.

The second thing which occurred that Christmas week was the unusual disability and indisposition on the part of several of our workmen to remember Christmas season to keep it sober. Two of them stayed away at great length and the *Telegraph* almost missed two issues. Sam Hod came across with a letter which he laid on my desk.

"Bill," said he, "I'm sick of these journeymen. I'm going to get some workmen of a little higher class. Joshua Purse's boy has written asking if there's an opening on our staff. He says he can do anything on a newspaper from sweeping the floor to writing editorials. I'm going to send for him to come down and talk it over."

Two days later the Purse boy came.

Hiring a new man from that time onward grew into a ceremony for Young Sam. There was a long visit and catechism in the private office and negotiations extending over another day in the matter of duties and wages. Jack had been closeted with Sam about twenty minutes when the editor was called across the street. He left Jack in the private office with the door open. Jack moved across into Sam's swivel chair before this battered table and began to read over some of the exchanges.

He was so occupied when Mary came through with a proof of an editorial in her soiled hands. She heard the well-known creak of the desk chair in the inner office. She supposed that it was Sam. She entered the private sanctum with her eyes riveted on the proof. She laid it down on the table, and then she missed the familiar baldspot on top of the head of the man to whose attention she had called an error. She took her eyes from the type and started back when she recognized a stranger. A stranger?

She saw a lad of about her own age, slenderly built, with a fine serious face, high forehead and wavy brown hair who was half a head taller than herself and looked shyly into her eyes with honest confusion. For a moment boy and girl stared at one another without speaking. Then:

"I beg your pardon," faltered Mary, "I thought you were Mr. Hod."

"I'm John Purse," he said half-apologetically, as though it explained everything. "I'm hoping to get a place here."

The girl was staring at his fine face. The sensation which comes to all of us at times of having been in exactly the same circumstances and done the same thing before when we know we have not, came

over her then. A stranger? This young chap was not a stranger. Wherever had she seen him before?

"I — I — thought for a moment that I knew you," she went on. "Your face is familiar."

He laughed, showing a set of fine even teeth.

"And I was thinking the same of you."

"Have you ever been in Paris before?"

"No."

"Or North Foxboro?"

"No." He fingered his watch charm. "And you haven't ever been up to North Sidney? I come from there, you know. My father and I have been running the newspaper there. He died last week."

"I know," said Mary. "I'm so sorry for you. I set up Mr. Hod's editorial about it. I hope you get the place here. Mr. Hod is one of the finest men I know."

"I hope I get the place also," the boy returned.

So Jack came among us.

"Who's that girl?" he asked of "Slob" Hanchette, indicating Mary Wood.

"Her? Oh, that's Slug Truman's 'girl' — least-wise he's been flirtin' round her a lot lately, though folks say they can't see why she lets him make an easy mark out o' her just because he's got money. But that's always the way, Ma says. And Pa, he says that many a chap who wouldn't knock a feller man when he was down or kick a cripple nor overturn a baby carriage, thinks he's did somethin' smart when he's got the best o' some poor trustin' girl. She'll fall fer him afore he's through with her — see if she don't."

"Who's Slug Truman?"

"He's a sort of a sport 'round here. Ma says all he's good for is sausage meat and to make muddy

tracks on the church carpet and Pa, he says all he's good for is to put some o' old Short-Cramp's widder's-mites back into the channels o' trade. Say, Mr. Purse, what's 'widder's-mites'?"

"Money," answered Jack. "He's rich, you say? And courtin' that girl? And is she poor?"

"Yep — poorer than old Mis' Marks down by the Gas Works, and that's goin' some! Her folks live out to Cobb Hill. Ma says her mother's a softie and Pa says if there was more like her, there'd be less old men go to the devil and less young ones go to N' York. He beat her up, one night — her stepfather did. So she come over here and got a job. Slug rescued her then. He come along and found her bein' beaten up and he sicked his bulldog, Cardinal Wolsey, onto him. Anybody'll tell you the story."

Jack Purse worked over his forms in silence for a time, casting clandestine glances at Mary.

"Is she engaged to — marry him?" asked Jack.

"Dunno. Most folks doubt it. But she lets him kiss her. I seen her. I was goin' past his house last Sunday night and I seen her let him kiss her behind the glass o' the Truman front door. I tole Ma about it and Ma, she says something about the social precipice and Pa, he says: 'Gawd, that's too bad.' Say, Mr. Purse, what's the Social Precipice?"

"When you get older you'll understand," said Jack.

His eyes were upon the dainty features bent over the composing stick and the pretty, slender back bowed over the typcase. "And who's the black-eyed girl always talking about her 'fellers'?"

"That's Mibb Henderson. Her mother runs the

mill boarding house and makes old Harvey eat the chicken gizzards and pie-crusts. Old Harvey got some kind of a crick in his back stabbin' the enemy at Bull Run and ain't been able to do a stroke o' work since. Mibb sings."

"She does what?"

"She sings — solos and songs. They been tryin' to get her into the quartet at the Methodist church for two years to take the place of old Mis' Busbee who always flats on High C, but Mibb says the only time they'll ever get her into a church will be so the proper number o' folks can file past and remark 'Don't she look natural.' Means when she's dead, I guess, and folks come to her funeral. Ma says all she needs is her ears boxed regular an a few chores to make her realize she lives in a New England small town. Pa, he says she's an after-nine-o'clock girl and if she was his daughter he'd stop it if he had to go lookin' for her in his carpet slippers. And that always makes Ma sore because she thinks it's a slam at the slippers she give him Christmas and she says he won't get another pair next Christmas if his feet after hours has to go naked."

Jack spotted an ad in the forms and undid the string from around it. Then he wetted it with a sponge to keep the rules from falling over until he had his column rules in place.

"You don't wanner go chasin' either one of 'em unless you got money, though," went on the irrepressible Hanchette young one. "Because that's principally all they think about — both of 'em. Ma says the younger generation is perkin' up and Pa, he says thank Gawd he's shot his bolt and ain't called on to strain his liver no longer on the

gentler sex's demand for doo-dabs. Have you got any money, Mr. Purse?"

"Not — much," confessed our new employee.

"Then take my advice and choose Annie," went on Slob. "She's fat but she's inexpensive and chocolates that come twenty cents a pound tickles her just as much as the kind that comes by the box with a ribbon around 'em."

"Thanks," said Jack dryly.

Jack had occasion to speak to the girl that afternoon when she came over to the imposing stones to get an empty galley.

"Is it a good town here to live in?" he asked.

She avoided his eyes as she replied:

"There isn't much going on — at times. It gets — lonesome."

She dropped the galley with a loud clatter; it had slipped from her grasp. They both reached for it at the same moment. Their heads came together.

"I think," said the boy grimly, "that I'm seeing more stars than you are!"

"That," she replied, "is an awful exaggeration!"

They laughed.

A few days later Sam came into the front office. He was only a young man in those days — we were all young then — and only a few years older than Mary Wood.

"That new man of ours is falling in love with that Wood girl as sure as the Lord made cider apples! You mark me! The son of a gun! And I was just on the point of falling in love with her myself."

"He's poorer than Job's turkey," replied Harriet Babcock at the proofreader's desk.

“What ice does that cut when a chap gets the girl fever?” demanded Sam.

“I guess Slug Truman will have something to say about that,” commented Harriet. “Wait and see. Heavens and earth! Here comes Mrs. Blake Whipple with her list of actors for the Odd Fellows’ play. Let me duck!”

CHAPTER VII

IN WHICH WE ATTEND THE REHEARSAL OF THE
ODD FELLOW'S PLAY AND FROM THE WINGS
WATCH A HERO AND HEROINE INDUSTRIOUSLY
FALLING IN LOVE

THE time seemed to pass quickly after Jack came to work for us and Daddy Joe began nodding approvingly when he saw the beautiful head of little Mary Wood bent over the forms alongside Jack Purse's wavy pompadour.

We do not recollect where that winter went, but we do remember very well that play the Odd Fellows gave in the Opera House. It is embodied in this narrative because it is typical of amateur plays everywhere and because it marked another gala night in the Wood girl's life and led afterward to the picnic in Gold-Piece Cabin up the Glen.

It came about that the first wonderful spring that Jack Purse was in Paris, a handful of good women, whose altruism and untiring endeavor was the backbone of the social life in our community, stayed after the regular meeting of Rebekah Lodge, No. 1533, and listened to the proposal advanced by Mrs. Blake Whipple under the enthusiastic persuasion of none other than Mibb Henderson of our office. Mrs. Whipple occupied the chair. Harriet Babcock, our proofreader and office girl, was also there and Mrs. Ben Williams, wife of our

local clothier; also the Blair sisters, spinsters, who had money and who looked and dressed as near alike as two peas. Alice Whiting was there, the school teacher out in the Green Valley who afterward married Sam Hod — and Grace Rawlins whose specialty was music and whose disposition was not all that it might have been. Aunt Julia Farrington and Mrs. Ebenezer Mathers completed the committee, women who usually said the least and did the most work at any given public function, particularly the ever-necessary cleaning up afterward.

“What kind of a play could we give, now?” ruminated Mrs. Whipple. “You know it’s hard to interest the men folks; usually they haven’t much time to memorize parts or come to rehearsals.”

Old Sol Hopper, the janitor, who some folks said wasn’t quite right in his head, sat among a mass of empty seats in the rear. A silence following Mrs. Whipple’s question, old man Hopper contributed the opinion that, “The King of the Cannibal Islands” wasn’t a bad show; he’d seen it put on by the Odd Fellows up to Wickford and a pleasant time was had by all. Grace Rawlins wanted to know if Hopper was crazy and said “The King of the Cannibal Islands” called for a cast in brown tights. Whereupon old man Hopper retorted “what of that?” and the assembled matrons turned upon him to a woman and Mrs. Williams reminded him that his job was to keep the furnace coaled and the hall clean and that bar-room pleasantries were entirely uncalled for in a business session of perfect ladies. Which rather dampened Old Man Hopper’s enthusiasm for the project and he sloughed down onto the small of his back and meditated darkly on the ingratitude of all flesh.

Alice Whiting mentioned "East Lynne" but Mrs. Whipple declared that "East Lynne" was played out. Mrs. Mathers suggested "Uncle Tom's Cabin" that being the only play she had ever witnessed and her acme of dramatic attainment; but Mrs. Williams maintained it was too much work to get up a street parade. Whereat the prospect sagged. Mrs. Whipple then turned suddenly to Harriet and demanded to know what kept them from putting on a play written as well as acted by local talent. Who had more talent and training for that chore than Harriet who wrote many of the items each week for the paper and once received five dollars for an anecdote sent to the *Youth's Companion*. Yes, the very idea! Harriet should write a play.

Harriet blossomed out in crimson and said she could never do it in the wide, wide world. But Harriet's heart was going pitapat and all the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't have dragged her into a permanent refusal. So they had to spend fifteen minutes coaxing her and at the end of that time Harriet agreed to write a play and Mrs. Whipple agreed to continue the canvass of the town and see who would be willing to act in the play which Harriet wrote.

"We ought to have specialties between the acts," said Mrs. Whipple. "Some one ought to come out and sing or recite something."

Mrs. Williams suggested getting Doctor Johnson's wife to sing; she carried the air in the Methodist church. But Ophelia Blair said the doctor's wife was a Methodist and didn't believe in the stage. And then they suggested Mrs. Parker Turner whose husband manages the gas works. But the argument was advanced that Mrs. Parker Turner

had studied music for a year in New York and would consider it beneath her dignity to appear in such a vulgar low-brow capacity as a between-the-acts feature in a small-town show. It ranked her with little cigars or ventriloquists or ice water.

"We needn't lose any sleep over it," snapped Grace Rawlins, "because if worse comes to worst we'll get Mibb Henderson. Leave it to me as part of the music."

Then Mrs. Whipple said: "I wonder if we can get Georgie Griffin to help us with rehearsals? The Masons had him last year in their minstrel show!"

"Sure we'll get Georgie," declared Clementine Blair. "He's property man at the Opera House, and if we rent the place, we rent Georgie's services."

On the following afternoon, Mrs. Blake Whipple took stock of herself and girded up her loins and applied to her person sundry dashes of perfumery and looked at the back of her head with a hand mirror and was sure she had her notebook and pencil. Then she ordered the smallest boy to wipe his nose and stop hollering and she sallied forth into the byways as a fisher of men.

It is verbose to record her visits of that afternoon or the amazing amount of duties demanding undivided attention during the coming month on the part of our townspeople, chiefly male, which prevented them from demonstrating their dramatic ability. But Mrs. Whipple was not to be cast down. She was one of those who set their faces to the stars and whose voices reply from far up the heights. At half-past five she came in to Harriet, and to the playwright she handed over a list of names of the anointed. And that night Harriet took the list home with enough copy paper to write a three-

decker novel and enough of our office advertising pencils to rewrite it after it was written.

She withdrew to her room and took all the things off her center table and spread thereon last week's copy of our little local paper and fixed the light and seated herself and wooed the muse. And the pencils were indelible pencils and Harriet went to bed that night with a mouth resembling the eating of much huckleberry pie. Which is mentioned to emphasize her concentration. She wrote an outline of her play the first night and tried to make the local characters fit in. It was hopeless and she tore it up. She tried it again on the second night and was as far from satisfaction as ever. She tried again and again and three or four times was panic-stricken. Finally she jogged up her pages and looked her work over and pronounced it good, although the evening and the morning were the sixth day. Sighing in relief she affixed to the top of her manuscript the highly-dramatic title: "Lady Audrey's Mistake."

We never could exactly figure out just what Lady Audrey's mistake was, — unless it was being dragged into the play at all. Because Lady Audrey was more sinned against than sinning, having at divers times and in sundry seasons before the play opened been treated roughly by a party in a waxed moustache and a plug hat who was the father of her daughter. In the fullness of time she discovered herself up in New England without a place to lay her head and being at the end of her resources, moral, financial and physical, she appealed to strangers for assistance and repaid their goodly offices by dying a few minutes later in their back kitchen. Just for that the orphan daughter eventually grew up into an appleblossom of a young

thing who ran away to the city and almost missed marrying into the aristocracy if it hadn't been discovered by means of a locket that she was of the aristocracy herself. It was a brilliant and original plot and Harriet was to be congratulated. Which Harriet was, — profusely.

The point is that the play was finished and duly read by Georgie Griffin and the rest, although it cannot be said that Georgie approved of it as enthusiastically as the cast who must act it. Notices therefore with the date and admission prices were duly printed in our paper with the announcement prominent at the bottom that homemade candy would be on sale between the acts; also — for our opera house is built with a flat floor and removable seats for just this purpose — that the affair would be followed by a dance at which ice cream and cake would be procurable for a consideration. Harriet was inclined to feel peevish about that footnote. Somehow it detracted from the quality of her effort and grossly commercialized the drama. We suspect that Harriet had artistic temperament. Such things have happened.

There were rehearsals one night a week at first to which everybody came late, bringing the information that they hadn't had time to learn their parts very well but would do better next week. The second week so many folks were absent that Grace Rawlins got huffy and declared that if no more interest was going to be taken in it than this they might as well chuck it all up right here and now. Georgie agreed with her, using the spittoon copiously, and said he was glad to see somebody in the bunch showed traces of brains. But some one retorted that Grace was sore because they wouldn't let her play at the Woodman's

dance next week and for everybody not to mind her and as for Georgie, a few opinions out of him one way or another would never have any effect on the world, anyhow. And Mrs. Whipple suggested that rehearsals be held twice a week and a third week there was some semblance of a company who knew at least one quarter of their parts. The fourth week everybody sent in word that they knew their parts letter perfect and could say them in their sleep. But a great sickness began to seize the soul of Mrs. Whipple because the advertisements had been running for days, and two hundred and seventeen tickets had been sold and there hadn't been one complete rehearsal. Then, as happens in such affairs the nation over, the play being scheduled eight weeks ahead, about ten days beforehand everybody put in an appearance at once and came into belated action with such a whirlwind of rehearsing and feverishness of preparation that they lost their manuscripts and their cues and their tempers and blamed every one else for everything; and two people walked out cold and their places had to be filled by others, and one girl worked so hard over her lines she was taken sick abed, which made her mother declare that the pace the young folks lived these days was a caution and would open the eyes of the dead.

All of which having been duly set down, as it has been written in the book of the prophets since the days when small towns and Odd Fellows lodges and depleted treasuries were young, brings us in the course of things to Georgie Griffin, rehearsals and eventually romance, — for Jack Purse and Mary had been cast to play the leads in that little local talent play.

Georgie was a bony, undersized little fellow as hard as nails with a fluffy down on his jaw, a quid of tobacco in his cheek the size of a small hen's egg and a disposition somewhat soured on life by reason of the many trials and sufferings that were the heritage of his profession. He installed meters for the gas company daytimes and on show nights acted as property man at our only playhouse. Property man! Georgie Griffin was more. Georgie was the whole opera house. Ask any one who ever tried to put on a show there. They'll tell you. And when they get through telling you, you'll understand.

For Georgie had artistic temperament, whether the Babcock girl did or not, — an awful dose of it, which is an extremely unfortunate thing for a property man in an opera house in a little town, particularly if the actors be local. For in a case like the present one Georgie had ideas how a show should be put on. Furthermore Georgie had full control over the vocabulary adequate to express them. Up to Georgie it was to make of Harriet's milksop manuscript a theatrical knock-out.

Now Georgie clothed himself by day and also by evening in a pair of smudgy white overalls the size whereof was enormous and the pockets of which were popularly supposed to contain any little thing wanted, from a pair of andirons to a four-poster bed. He wore a blue shirt, the collar of which was always turned up about his neck, and on Georgie's head was an over-sized cap which came down to his ears. In fact, one might say that no one would ever look upon him and then confuse him with any one else.

Having been bribed and bought and complimented and labored with he had eventually assented to act as stage director and general supervising dramatist.

Therefore he procured a kitchen table from regions back stage — or it may have been his overalls — and came grunting out with it. He planked it in the center of the platform as close to the footlights as it would go without sliding over into the pit of the orchestra and spilling Georgie off onto the pianist's head. Then he went behind the scenes again and returned with a cuspidor nearly as large as himself, which he set down on the floor conveniently at hand, sampled it a couple of times to see that it was working properly, and finding it was, called the courageous to the chalk mark.

Georgie sweat and he swore and emptied his soul of sarcasm and his mouth of tobacco juice. He waved the manuscript and he waved the hammer; he jumped off the table a dozen times a minute and he jumped back again. His initiative was phenomenal. As an illustration: when no live baby could be procured for Lady Audrey to carry in rehearsals he substituted a sofa pillow. And the spectacle of an emaciated woman falling into the door of a farmhouse in the last stages of collapse, going through four minutes of "heaven-will-care-for-the-child" doggerel and then blandly handing over a sofa pillow with a six-inch rip in the stuffing shrieked to high heaven for applause. The funny part of it was that Georgie never saw that it was funny.

Jack Purse had been cast for the hero's part, and because she had the time and the conscientiousness to devote to it, and because by such situations are the whole courses of our lives affected, Mary Wood was cast for the heroine. That little local talent play! How strange that it should have been proposed just then.

The first act of "Lady Audrey's Mistake" was

divided into two parts. The first was given over to that much abused lady's demise and the bequest of her offspring to the good-hearted strangers.

Then the curtain came down for three minutes, supposed to represent the passing of two decades while the orphaned child grew to maturity.

When the first half of the act had been concluded somewhere near to Georgie's satisfaction, the curtain arose on the real beginning of the story, twenty years after. Mary, in the rôle of the girl who was to be enticed away to the city by the villain, was discovered sitting in the kitchen. On should come the hero and make love to her, — love which was true love indeed because it was not destined to run smooth. And Jack came on.

"Come on now! Come on now!" ordered Georgie from his table-top. "Get busy with the love stuff. Come up behind her and give her a kiss, when she don't expect it. Make it a humdinger so the whole house won't mistake it — like an old she-cow pulling her hoof out of a bog. You're in love with each other, ain't yer? Well, well, mix together as though you had sunstroke."

Jack looked into the girl's eyes and the girl blushed crimson.

"In the play I mean!" added Georgie.

"Yes," whispered the girl.

"Well then, act like lovers and not like a couple of elephants tryin' to cuddle down together in a coal hod. Start in, Jack Purse! Git your hands blindin' her eyes and then get in your lovin' properly. Cripes! You act as if you was scared of her. Does she bite?"

Jack went out as he was bidden. He came softly in on tip toe. He stole his fingers around the girl's

eyes. As she dropped the pan in her lap, he kissed her.

It was only a stage kiss, a kiss in a play. But it was the first kiss he had ever given her. The blood pounded strong in his temples when he had given it. For the scent of her hair and her soft flesh was in his senses. He was muddled and clumsy and confused when Mary turned to confront him, — as she was supposed to confront him in the play. His eyes dropped. He could not meet her gaze.

“Do it over again!” interrupted Georgie. “Do it without actin’ as if it was a public misdemeanor!”

The little girl flushed furiously and tried it again. Grace Rawlins got huffy and wanted to know whether this was a play or a game of postoffice, and Dick Robinson said it was no wonder some chaps would consent to play hero parts for nothing, and young Sam Hod declared that some guys were born lucky anyhow. And all the time something in the touch of the girl was calling to something deep in the boy, something he had never felt before, something he could hardly understand. And through the rest of that play and that rehearsal there seemed a strange intimacy between himself and Mary Wood. When, in the last act and just before the final curtain, he took the girl in his arms, he hated the brazen publicity of it all. She was soft and delicate and fragile and sweet to his embrace, and again and again when he had gone home to his room at night he lived over and over those moments.

On the last night before the play he arrived late at his own boarding place after seeing Mary to her gate. He parted the curtains and stood looking out over the soft sleeping village swathed in romantic moonlight. A strange pain, an uneasiness, a weird, wild

dissatisfaction filled him. It seemed as though he wanted to walk on and on all night. Action, motion, were the only things which could ever end his awful nervousness. Over and over he saw the girl's face before him as he drew her to him in the play! the brown eyes with the lovelight in them—and the dare and the deviltry, although a good little deviltry—and he was made frantic with sudden heart-hunger and longing for her in some other way than theatrical make-believe.

“Mary! Mary!” he cried. “I’ve only known you just a little while. But it’s the truth, Mary Wood!—I love you! And to-morrow night—to-morrow night the play will be over and a memory of the past. After that —! Oh Mary! I’m going to have you! I’m going to have you!—somehow!—for my own—forever! poor little play! Will I ever forget ‘Lady Audrey’s Mistake’?”

It was plain however that Georgie Griffin held no such temperamental sentiments about “Lady Audrey’s Mistake.” On that same night that Jack was walking home through the New England moonlight with Mary he sat on a trunk back in the opera house and pounded aimlessly and morosely on its front with his property hammer dangling between his knees.

“Act? If this bunch was to go to N’ York, there ain’t one in the whole flock could get an engagement as ‘shouts outside’ or a ‘dead body’! And when it comes to applause, we’ll be lucky if some yellow dog will only wander in and wag his tail!”

There were indications it was going to be a great return of value for the admission money.

CHAPTER VIII

IN WHICH HERO AND HEROINE IN THE RÔLE OF
PLAY-ACTORS WIN THE VILLAGE APPLAUSE AND
THERE COMES A DANCE AFTERWARD.

THE great night of the play arrived. At eight o'clock high school boys in their old-fashioned Sunday go-to-meetin' clothes were ushering fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters, and aunts and uncles and spinisters and bachelors and the strangers within the gates, to their places. In the big auditorium there was much clumping down of seats and ladies unwinding scarfs from the heads and men standing up here and there to pull off overcoats and noisy rustling of programs printed that afternoon at our little printing office, and the town crank damning the house and performance and solar system generally because he'd been given a seat with a broken wire hat-rack beneath his cosmos, to hold a hat that at home was hung upon the floor.

But if there was hustle and bustle and thrilling expectancy out in front, what was it behind on the stage? Mrs. Christopher Stacy had been given Lady Audrey's part because she had the proper tragedy in her temperament by special endowment from nature, and not much else, and a willingness to stay where she was put and not offer advice. She was weak in the knees and ill in the stomach because she was the first person to go on and every line of her part had fled from her head and would not return

regardless of how much she applied herself to her manuscript.

Mrs. Whipple was moving around among the players and stage hands in her make-up, and people who had known her since infancy were staring at her and asking who the strange woman was anyhow; for the sallow yellow of Mrs. Whipple's countenance had fled before the application of grease-paint and penciling, and Mrs. Blake Whipple was not Mrs. Blake Whipple at all, but a girl of sweet sixteen whose youth had been renewed like the eagle's; and some of the women were asking nastily where she had ever learned to make up like that and she must have had a past.

Chubb Barber the shoeman, who agreed with everybody and never ran an ad in our paper that cost more than forty cents, and who was to play the irate foster parent, was monopolizing the peekhole in the curtain and beholding the size of the audience growing ever greater, and agreeing with everybody and wetting his lips and wishing to Gawd he was home. Mrs. Hoadley, the barber's wife, was there, sitting around on things always needed next to dress the stage and jouncing on her nervous knee the momentous little Rollin Hoadley who was the cause of it all, and who was to be carried right on and right off very carefully, and who had been loaned after much coaxing. Most of the boys were out on the fire-escapes, smoking in the reviving coolness of the evening and fortifying themselves for the ordeal ahead. Everywhere was confusion and the giving of orders which no one executed, and proffering of help where it was least needed, and advice and sarcasm and turmoil and a time of trouble such as there never has been since there was a nation.

But Georgie was there! And Georgie was boss! But alas! — how empty is public honor. For never in all the lengths and breadths and depths of time or infinity had there been such an occasion as this where the answer to every snarl was that since-coined phrase! “Let George do it!”

George was doing it or it didn't get done.

He'd hired old Peter Ferguson to come in and help with the “props.” But before showing up for work Peter had stopped en route and looked upon the wine when it was red and allowed it to sting him like a serpent and bite him like an adder. And so Peter wasn't good for much but to say “yes, sir” and then forget what Georgie had told him.

Georgie was an overworked man. Somehow when he grabbed hold of a piece of scenery and juggled it across the floor he had the appearance of a man grabbing hold of the Woolworth building to keep it upright in a high wind. He sent sundry persons out after things which they brought back late or did not bring back at all, so that Georgie was fated to forget that ladies were present and indulge in strong phrases. At twenty-five minutes to nine the house was packed and the boys in the gallery were giving catealls and Grace Rawlins had been back-stage twice to inform him that the bunch out front was getting out of control and why in Sam Hill didn't Georgie get a move on himself and what did he think this was anyway, — a Jew picnic? Georgie had retorted that if she didn't like his speed she could do it herself and if that didn't suit her, she knew where she could go. And Grace had retorted that if it wasn't for hurting people's feelings she might open her mouth and say something, and Georgie had replied it wouldn't be anything new, and Grace slammed out into the

auditorium again to smile at every one and act busy at the piano as if she'd gotten instructions to go ahead, which she hadn't.

At ten minutes to nine the fathers out front were publicly asking if they'd forgotten back of the curtain that there were heads of families in the place who had to get some sleep before morning, and on the stage Mrs. Hoadley was overheard by struggling, swearing Georgie to say that if he didn't hurry up she'd have to take baby home, because baby wasn't used to being out so late nights. And then, just when the town cut-up out front had let out an agonizing yawn that was heard all over the place and received a laugh, the orchestra lamps blinked and saved Grace Rawlins' life, and she said thank Gawd and broke out into the overture and played it, and the curtain worked by old Peter Ferguson in the scenery loft lifted on a stage wherein Mibb, in the capacity of the foster mother, was cooking industriously and waiting for the door to be opened violently on tragedy.

In all of the rehearsals, Mrs. Stacy in the capacity of Lady Audrey had died and bequeathed to her kind-hearted friends the half-disemboweled sofa pillow. This now was the real thing and requiring a real baby; the curtain was up and waiting; Mibb was singing about her work and waiting for the fatal knock; Lady Audrey was bolstered up with smelling salts and a glass of cold water and approached the Hoadley woman to get the illegitimate progeny. But out in front the tittering and expectant audience suddenly heard a peal of infantile despair as though somebody's offspring was being strangled. That baby wasn't going to leave the Hoadley woman, not if it knew it. And it calculated that it did.

"What am I going to do, I can't take it on kicking and shrieking like this!" declared Mrs. Stacy.

"Choke it!" suggested Georgie. And if looks would have killed, the young one would have ceased to exist on the spot.

Again Mrs. Stacy assayed to borrow the baby. It planted a number one foot in the hollow of her left cheek and howled like an Apache.

"What are we going to do?" cried Mary in alarm. "The curtain's up and the audience is waiting!"

"We ought to have thought of this before!" cried Mrs. Whipple. Then to Georgie: "Is there a big doll in the house we can use in its place?" Thereat the assembled players turned to Georgie as though he might have such a thing in his white overalls.

"There is not!" declared Georgie. "If that brat won't consent to let itself be borrowed, why we simply got to leave it keep its mother. Mis' Hoadley'll have to go on and play Lady Audrey herself!"

Then it was the mother's turn to have a convulsion.

Georgie was equal to the occasion. He told her all she had to do was stagger across the stage and die on the sofa and leave it to Mibb's initiative to make up the impromptu lines for the lack of Lady Audrey's speech. But Mrs. Hoadley was obdurate.

And all the time the baby was yelling its head off and some boys up in the gallery were stamping on the floor.

Georgie realized with a great realization it was up to him to do something and he did it. He grabbed hold of the Hoadley woman — bawling child and all — opened the canvas door and shoved her through. Then he planked his foot against it so she couldn't

get back. The astounded and flabbergasted Mrs. Hoadley found herself for once in the public eye in a manner that from the standpoint of her feelings ought to have put that eye out. And the audience was treated to the spectacle of a woman with a bawling infant assisted violently into the stage kitchen by a party prominent in white overalls and the door slapped shut in a manner that rocked the scenery. Then the baby quit as promptly as it had begun, and to the uttermost parts of that house penetrated apparently the opening line of the play :

“My Gawd! If Jim Hoadley knew I was here, he’d rip this place into tatters!”

Which considering that Jimmy Hoadley never did anything more spectacular than post bills for a living, struck Paris as rather overdrawn.

Hoarse whispers advised Mibb what the trouble was, and she rose to the dilemma.

“Have you no friends, my good woman?” she asked earnestly.

“No! If I had,” retorted the Hoadley woman, “they’d take Georgie Griffin out and lynch him!”

It was several moments before order was restored.

“Come, rest awhile, my dear,” struggled Mibb bravely onward. Then in an undertone: “—— Please don’t spoil the play at the start, Amy! Do your best for the sake of the rest of us.”

The appeal in Mibb’s voice softened the Hoadley woman somewhat and for a wonder her baby kept quiet. She looked back and saw her retreat cut off and for the sake of the ugly predicament of the rest she decided to pull things through somehow.

“All right,” she agreed. Then aloud and to the stark astonishment of the rest on the other side the set: “He’s deserted me! He’s deserted me!” she

suddenly cried. And she staggered magnificently across to the sofa.

It was the audience's turn to gasp. The Hoadley woman's last audible reference had been to Georgie Griffin, and Paris batted the public eye. Was she referring perhaps to Jim Hoadley. The Hoadley woman's name was not on the program. Was a juicy bit of dramatic scandal being promulgated? It was an awful half-moment!

"Cripes!" said Georgie weakly, "I see where I need a drink!"

But the Hoadley woman went on:

"He deserted me and left me penniless.— I'm sick and dying. Have pity on a poor unfortunate sister and care for my child. Heaven will reward you! — and about its neck you will find a locket that — that —"

"Yes, yes!" cried Mibb. "That what, my dear?"

"That identifies it so that we can kill it to-morrow!" bawled Georgie from the wings.

But the Hoadley woman had fallen back apparently dead!

"The poor, poor motherless little thing!" went on Mibb, picking up the threads of her mangled lines. And she went to take the infant from the apparently deceased mother's arms.

But would that brat consent to be taken by Mibb any more than by Mrs. Stacy? Not on your grandmother's tintype! Mibb acquired it by the laying on of hands but it was like picking up a twelve-pound chunk of howling wildcat. That child knew it was on the stage and hogged the scene with every last trick of a cheap actor. Mibb tried to comfort it and get a word in between breaths. The other

players came on as they were supposed to come on, but not a word could get across the footlights. That infant kicked and fought and squealed. The scene was finished somehow in a pandemonium of terrific bawls; and Mibb got white-faced fearing it would go into convulsions. Slug Truman suggested she lay it on its stomach, and Georgie Griffin from behind made some frightfully suggestive pantomime with his property hammer, and all the mothers in the audience said it was a shame to abuse a child so but what could you expect from that Hoadley woman, — she never had a brain in her head anyhow. Again it was up to Georgie to do something and again Georgie did it.

“Run down the curtain!” he ordered.

The curtain was lowered, but did that child notice it? No. It was a very peevish child and set in its ways. Its mother leaped up, once the curtain had fallen, and took it and patted it on the back and laid it over her shoulder and said let her get out and take it home, and Georgie said yes for Gawd’s sake let her. And the Hoadley woman postponed settling with Georgie until a more auspicious time and the audience followed that child in all its journeyings for the next three minutes, twice around the stage and downstairs to where the mother got her wraps, and down the stairs outside and along the wall of the opera house under the east windows, and down the street until a merciful distance made the episode only a nightmare.

And Uncle Joe Fodder in the front row remarked that “Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings the Lord may have ordained truth; but not that Hoadley suckling! It was a delusion and a snare and undoubtedly would end its days on the gallows!”

There were many other incidents in that play, amusing enough if told at length, but they have no

vital bearing on our story. Jack came in and surprised Mary — he caressed her as per schedule, in which some boys in the gallery assisted with shrill whistles. He went through the usual pabulum of an amateur play, stiffly and awkwardly and frightened half out of his senses. Frank Whitcomb, who was messenger and boy of all work in Amos Farmers' bank, entered in the capacity of villain and enticed Mary away to the city. The Henderson girl sang her songs between the acts. In the second act young Sam Hod nearly upset the scenery by catching his toe under a corner while coming on at a run, and between the second and third acts tragedy was narrowly averted when some one needed a barrel and didn't know what to do with the property tinware it contained, and Georgie told them to lift up the trap door in the stage and dump it into regions below; and some one did and Colonel Jethro Wilson was down there underneath the trap door "seeing what he could see" and got the whole five-and-ten-cent store poured merrily on his head.

The Henderson girl sang her songs between the acts! Yes, Mibb sang that night and we have never forgotten her singing because of the song which she sang. It was "Silver Threads Among the Gold."

"Silver Threads Among the Gold"! How she sang it! The audience had hooted and laughed at the rest of the little local talent play. But they did not hoot and laugh at Mibb's part in that entertainment. The girl's full rich contralto put a sweetness and a haunting melancholy into the lines and the melody which filled the eyes of old Uncle Joe Fodder with tears. For Uncle Joe had heard it in a younger and a happier day, — like many a gray-head in that audience. But the Henderson girl never knew of her

power and her gift, or if she knew, she did not care. It was very quiet in that hall when Mibb finished the ballad.

In the last act, too, after Jack had rescued his heroine for the last time from the toils of the villain, the curtain did not respond (for verily old Peter Ferguson had fallen asleep in the scenery loft under the soothing influence of the strong liquor by which he was ensnared). The perplexed audience was still further perplexed by sight of Georgie Griffin appearing suddenly in the middle of the stage where the final love scene was in process and shouting "Damn your immortal soul, send down that curtain!" and firing his property hammer insanely up into the wings. This brought down the curtain in one titanic flop, as though all the strings had been cut and it had fallen from the skies. But every one declared that Georgie Griffin always thought himself smart anyhow and what could you expect if he took it into his head to show off, and Uncle Joe Fodder remarked that all the cast appeared to lack was memory, concentration and self-confidence; outside of that it was all right and the play was a riot.

Then as per the advertising, the boys cleared the auditorium of seats and Grace Rawlins and Uncle Joe Fodder took their places; she before the piano, he beside her with his famous old violin, and we held the dance.

Mary Wood danced with Jack Purse that night. She danced more than once with him. And by the strange subtle telepathy which exists between youth, it was accepted that the new Jack Purse was Mary Wood's "fellow" and the new Mary Wood was Jack Purse's "girl." And the elders smiled, for they were a pretty pair — Jack and the Wood girl. And

the boys shrugged their shoulders; and the girls pretended not to mind. Round and round in a dreamy waltz Jack swung her, her body bending against his own, her eyes half-closed, her heart beating rhythmically to the young printer's, who held her close.

She laughed a bit sadly as they sat down along the side of the hall between dances and she fanned herself with her handkerchief.

"I'm sorry it's over," she said. "It's been a lot of fun; I'll always have it to think of — this little local-talent play. Somehow my good times in Paris seem to have begun since you came here, Jack."

Jack sat silently. A strange pain disturbed him, for the feel of her kisses was still hot upon his lips and the press of her soft yielding body in the waltzes was still in his senses.

"Look at Jack!" laughed Sam Hod. "Clean off his ballast in love! If ever there was a case of love at first sight it was that pair. And the girl's as addled over the boy as the boy is over the girl. Just look! — look at his hands, his necktie, his knees, his feet! Gad, what a wreck love makes of a man!"

Jack left the girl by the wall while he went to bring her a glass of water. And Mary Wood suddenly felt a pluck at her sleeve. She turned to find Herb Truman.

"I wanner see you, Mary!" he said thickly, "I jus' got to see you alone!"

"What's the matter, Herbert?"

"I jus' got to see you alone. I mean it."

"Herbert, you're ill!"

"Can't I see you alone — most anywheres?"

She arose and followed him outside.

CHAPTER IX

SO HERE THEN WE HAVE THE PROBLEM OLD AS EDEN ITSELF, AS TO WHICH IT IS BETTER TO DO, CHOOSE POVERTY WITH LOVE OR RICHES WITH DISSATISFACTION — WHICH THE WOOD GIRL SOLVES AFTER THE MANNER OF HER HEART, WITH RESULTS FAR-REACHING IN AFTER YEARS BECAUSE OF WHICH WE HAVE A STORY.

THEY went out of the Opera House and across the street and into the "Common" where the moths were winging around the sputtering, old-fashioned arc-lights, which threw pleasant shadows amid the shrubbery. They found a settee — a hideous fancy-iron settee — and they sat down and Mary waited anxiously. Across the street, high in the hall, the music struck up in another waltz.

"I've got to be going back, Herbert," she said. "Jack will be surprised not to find me when he returns. What was it you wanted?"

He took off his cap and the cowlick rose terrifically. He twisted the cap in his hands. He was pitiful in his misery. "*You!*" he blurted out.

"Me? What do you mean, Herbert?"

"*You!*" he cried doggedly. "You kissed him on the stage in front o' everybody. You been lettin' him dance most every dance with you! I know I got awful feet but —"

She wanted to laugh but could not.

"You've forgotten me since he came to work over to the *Telegraph* office," Herb said, his eyes averted.

"Oh, Herbert," cried the girl softly, "what can I say? What can I do?"

"I kind o' thought, when you lemme kiss you that night in my house —"

"Dear Herbert, it was wicked of me to have done that, — to have encouraged you. I've thought about it and thought about it and wondered what I could do to make amends. But I've always decided that to try to make amends would only fix a bad matter worse. I just hoped you'd forgive me and overlook it."

"Then I take it there ain't no chance."

"If you want to know it, yes, — I love Jack; it would be wicked to deny it. But what can I do when my heart is that way, Herbert?"

"Yes, I know. He ain't a clumsy lummoX like me always puttin' his hoof in it! He's good-lookin' and has got nice ways with the ladies. Look at the way he played the hero part in that show."

"It isn't that at all, Herbert. It was that Jack and I seemed like old friends from the start, although we both knew we never had seen one another before in our lives. I couldn't help falling in love with him. I didn't mean to treat you shabbily; I just couldn't help it."

"You'll be marryin' him, I suppose?"

"He hasn't asked me yet but — but —"

"But you expect he will. That's it, isn't it?"

She averted her face and poked at a little pile of sand between the bricks of the walk.

"Perhaps!" she said. "But it can't be for a long time, you know. Jack's father failed in business and his creditors lost a lot of money. Jack's got

to pay that money back; he thinks he's morally bound to do it. They trusted him and his father and there's no reason why they should lose. Perhaps after the money's paid we can begin to save for our home and when we get enough ——"

"If Purse owes as much as I hear he does, you'll be an awful long time gettin' married."

"We're young yet. There's ample time. Meanwhile we're together ——"

"Yes," said Herb sadly, "— you're together. That's a lot. I'm sorry it's him, Mary. I was hopin' it might be me. I was hopin' I could use the money I'm comin' into to make a nice girl like you — happy. Wouldn't you, Mary? Wouldn't you?"

Momentarily a vision of that luxurious front room in the Truman home arose before the girl! She gave thought, too, of her mother's experience with a poor man. But she was not alone now; the future was not uncertain. It made a difference.

"Well," concluded Herb philosophically as he moved away, "— there's many a slip between the cup and the lip, Mary Wood. Lots of things may happen while you're waitin' for Purse to pay up four thousand out of sixteen a week. I ain't goin' to lose hope entirely. But if you should marry him, I want you to know that I — that I loved you, Mary Wood. I ain't seen such an awful lot o' you. But you got hold o' me in a way no other woman or girl ever has. If you do marry him, I want you should know I don't harbor no bad feelings and hope you'll both be happy."

"Thank you, Herb," she said. "Next to Jack, I think more of you than any other man in the world."

"Well," decided Herbert, — "that's somethin'!"

"Is that all?" she asked.

He realized then how great and terrific was his failure. He was losing Mary Wood, the girl that he loved, to the Purse boy who was not lumberous and clumsy and did not have a cowlick and hands like hams, regardless of Sam Hod's declaration. The misery of his heart was appalling, unconsolable. He arose blindly.

"Aren't you coming back to the hall and stay until the end of the dance?"

"It — don't — matter," mumbled Herb. "No! It don't much matter—with me!" He moved away. "Good night, Mary," he said without looking at her.

And he left her standing there, wanting to run after him and console him and mother him and tell him how his disappointment hurt her, also. But he was gone amid the shrubbery and she went slowly back to the hall, the small-town gaiety and the music.

So fled her chance to marry a wealthy man.

She went back to the hall and to Jack, who was wildly looking for her and who demanded the cause of the tears in her eyes, — back to the boy whom she loved.

After the dance they walked homeward together.

"Good night," she said softly at the gate, as she held out her hand.

"Good night, Mary!" he replied thickly in turn. But he did not go.

The moon made mystic shadows of the street under the sleeping maples, of the long white fence flanked with the flower beds, of the lawn and the ghostly white Mather house. The xylophones of the crickets sounded from beneath the fences and the

hollow board walks. The songs of insect lovers piping out of tune, came to them. Down the street now and then showed a flash of a muslin dress — white in the moonlight — and the little shriek of a woman's laughter floated to them . . . carefree boys and girls going home from a dance! And under the moonlight the girl was twice as dainty and pretty as the boy had ever seen her before, for that is the way of moonlight and of spring nights and of women in days when we love.

Occasionally a couple strolled past them, — Sam Hod with Alice Whiting, Grace Rawlins with the Whitcomb boy. Even Georgie Griffin and the Whalen girl were out enjoying the beautiful exquisite summer night.

As Jack came away finally from the Mather's gate, the beauty and the sadness of the night and the heart cry of his new-found age-old love came to him as neither had ever impressed him before. And taking off his hat beneath the stars he murmured: "Oh, if it could always go on always!" But he knew it could not. And he was miserable and afraid.

CHAPTER X

IN WHICH THE HEARTS OF OUR FRIENDS ARE YOUNG
AND THE WORLD IS FAIR AND THE CHIEF CHAR-
ACTERS OF OUR STORY GIVE INDICATIONS OF
THEIR DESTINY.

LET us go back for a time and consider the Hendersons.

It would be difficult to state accurately whether or not Paris approved of the Hendersons.

The Hendersons came into town along with the railroad, — that is to say Mrs. Henderson came at the same time as the railroad and so Harvey had come too, there being no alternative for Mrs. Henderson's husband.

Ma Henderson weighed two hundred and forty pounds, two hundred of which was located in her chest. She had a firm mouth with knotted muscles at the corners thereof, and a faint moustache showing over all. She had a square jaw and a sour expression to her eye. And her husband, who had no business being one, went around with a dazed look in his lamblike eye as though perpetually pondering on how it had all happened, anyhow. He was a head shorter than Ma Henderson and about a hundred pounds lighter, and his cue was to say "I believe so, Ma", and spend his time smoking in the cellar, spitting in silence into the furnace or sitting in the cigar stores down-town. One

might say that Harvey Henderson lived under a perpetual matrimonial handicap.

They had not been in town long before Paris folks knew all the inner workings of the Henderson household and that Mrs. Harvey Henderson assumed full charge of Harvey's pension money as she assumed full charge of everything else belonging to Harvey. And because society has not yet reached that stage where it may take literally the biblical interpretation to take no thought what ye shall eat and drink or what ye shall put on, Ma Henderson was renting the big Squire place at the east end of Main Street and opening it as a boarding house.

And Ma Henderson for many years was miserable and lonesome, and the other wives of the town sought not her counsel nor her companionship.

It was with Mibb, the only daughter, that the chief deviltry was to pay. For as has been stated, early in life Mibb had witnessed many domestic altercations and set up a marital philosophy of her own. In that philosophy, man as a male held a very small and inconsequential position. But man as a provider of money was different. The neighbors whispered with significant eyebrows that Mibb Henderson often addressed her dad publicly and in the Henderson home by his first name, which after a time she shortened to "Harv." And her mother laughed and thought it smart and implanted in that poor handicapped young woman's head the sole idea that she must never commit her mother's mistake; Mibb — also like the Wood girl — must set her cap for money, the male of the species being a nobody and an easy mark anyhow.

So Mibb had gone to school in Paris and after

school spent much spare time down at the station watching the drummers come in. Finally she took a position in the *Telegraph* office.

She was not a bad girl; had she departed at any time from the straight and narrow pathway followed by our New England daughters, the town — even the girl friends to whom she condescendingly told deep things which no girls should know — wouldn't have tolerated Mibb for a moment. She was merely handicapped by a brainless, unnatural mother and a weak-willed father, and why she never stumbled over the edge of the social precipice will always remain one of the mysteries of small-town morality.

Mibb in our printing office was a bright girl and a good compositor — when she would work — which was chiefly when she especially wanted a new dress or a hat or something to wear to a party. But Ma Henderson came periodically to the conclusion that work before a type case was not dignified enough for an embryo "lady" and hinted often at Mabel's social standing and her chances to marry money; and Mibb as periodically laid down her stick and left us and stayed away from us and then came back again. Poor Mibb! Perhaps after all, like our old duplex press, she was more sinned against than sinning.

We had singing schools in those days. A crowd of six — Mibb Henderson and Dick Robinson, Sam Hod and Alice, Jack Purse and Mary were returning home from the last one for that spring season held in Green Valley, when they sat down on the wall about Seaver's pasture on another moonlit evening.

"Folks," announced Mibb, "I've had a proposal — a real proposal — a proposal of marriage!"

Mary glanced quickly at Mibb with disapproval strong on her fine features. Such things were not to be discussed lightly in public. But Mibb dug her foot deeply in the grass and the brierbloom and went on mischievously: "Now aren't some folks the jokers!"

Dick Robinson's lips closed grimly. We had known for a long time that Dick loved Mibb Henderson. But Dick was only a bookkeeper in the process works, and good looking though he was, his good looks would never make up for the tragedy of a pay envelope containing a mere ten dollars a week, — not to Mabel reared by her mother.

"I'd just as soon you'd keep such things in the same confidence in which they were spoken, Mibb," he said with hard insinuation.

"Now isn't he sensitive!" Mibb returned.

Mary and Jack were sitting side by side on the wall between Mibb and the girl's lover. Mary turned and looked at Dick, a picture of confusion, anger, misery and chagrin.

"Mibb," declared the sympathetic Mary, "such things are sacred!"

"*Sacred!*" Again the merry peal of laughter from Mibb. Finding that no one joined her and that only embarrassment resulted, she sobered.

"I thought we were all good friends together or I shouldn't have mentioned it," she said.

"We are good friends together, Mibb," declared Alice. "That's why Mary spoke so frankly." And the boys looked sheepishly at one another.

"I don't want to be married!" declared Mibb. "Not for a long, long time. I want to get the full fun out of life. When a girl gets married it means care and worry and work and squalling kids.

And besides," she added brutally, "I wouldn't marry anybody that was poor anyhow!"

Dick Robinson arose.

"I'll move along," he said. He started down the road alone, off into the night and back to town. And on another evening in a far distant year Mibb recalled his going, with a far different emotion in her heart. "Dick!" she cried. "Come back!"

But Dick paid her no attention. He disappeared around the bend in the road.

"Mabel — you're heartless!" Mary rebuked her.

But Mibb passed it off with a laugh.

"Dick should have known he was impossible," she said. "I don't see why he keeps thrusting himself upon me!"

"Dick's a good boy!" defended Alice "— as good as there is in Paris. He only makes ten dollars a week. But that isn't anything against him."

"Then let him come around when he makes more," replied Mibb. She was angry that the company had turned against her.

"You're putting it that nothing matters but dollars and cents," declared Alice. "That's heartless and silly, Mibb, and it leads only to unhappiness."

"Money won't buy happiness, Mibb," added Mary.

"Fiddlesticks," declared the Henderson girl.

Jack Purse's heart fluttered suddenly and wildly. For the hand that was laid on his arm to keep the Wood girl steady on the wall imparted some little pressure to that arm not at all necessary in the business of maintaining her equilibrium.

"I don't want to get married," repeated Mabel.

"I've always been sorry I was born a girl anyway. Girls and women get the hard end of marriage the same as everything else in life. It means work, work, work, marriage does, — work from morning till night and precious little thanks in return for the effort. It means waiting helplessly inside a home while a man makes good or doesn't make good, according to his ability. It means pain and suffering and sometimes death — and what do you get in return? Yes, what do you get in return? Answer me that! Men can get out in the world and do things. They're free to go and come as they like. They earn money that gives them the right to say how it shall be spent. It's a man's world and made for men, and all that's left for a woman is to play the second part; and if a girl's high-spirited and wants to rise above her lot, she's heartless and unnatural and shameless. She's a slave, that's what she is, — a slave. Deny it if you can. Cover it with fine phrases. Smooth it over with love and romance. But deep down underneath is the ugly truth just the same, the ugly truth of the slavery. And I won't be a slave! Even if you do call me heartless and unnatural I tell you I won't be a slave. I'm free now to live my life as I please and I'll keep so. If I do marry, it'll be because there's the money available to make me escape the slavery. It'll be because it'll help me to enjoy life and get out of it all there is in it. If that's shameful and bold and unwomanly, make the most of it. But it's my way of looking at things. So far in life I've seen no reason to change."

There was silence for a time. The words had a strange familiar ring in Mary's ears.

"Being married doesn't seem that to me at all,

Mibb," she replied softly. "I suppose it's all a difference in temperament. If you want to call it slavery, then — then — well, speaking for myself" — and her voice was very low and soft and almost a whisper — "I'm cheerfully willing to be that kind of slave, Mibb."

"You're a little fool!" retorted Mabel.

"You say it means work throughout life. But what of that, Mibb? All of us must work at something or other, mustn't we? Isn't work a law of life? Why not in a home that's your own among people that you love, as anywhere? You say it means waiting for the man you marry to succeed. But that isn't a hardship, Mibb? It's a privilege. If you pick out the right man, and he's honest, and ambitious and capable, why isn't it the most interesting game in the world to play, Mibb? — to watch him step by step as he climbs upward; and help him to do it; and climb upward with him; and some day stand on the summit with him and have the same feeling 'together we did it'! You say it means pain and suffering and sometimes death — but what of that, Mibb? Only the cowardly shrink from pain and suffering and death. I am not afraid of work and pain and suffering — because it's far from being all shadows; there's compensation, Mibb. Beautiful compensation—!"

Mary's voice was unsteady. Sam and Jack looked at her. In the moonlight they fancied her eyes were wet with tears.

"Mary," returned Mabel, "you're sickishly sentimental. It's women like you that are holding other women down in society. The time's coming, Mary, like Grace Rawlins says, when women with those old-fashioned ideas are going to give way. This is

going to stop being a man's world. It's going to be a woman's world as well, Mary. Women are going to be equal with men —"

"Aren't they equal now, Mibb?"

"Aren't they now? No, they aren't! I've told you this is a man's world, and I've told you why."

"It seems to me they're equal to men if they care to do the right thing. It seems to me it's wholly a matter for the individual girl to settle, Mibb. She can pick up the right sort of husband and be a partner to him and enjoy all he enjoys and be his wife and sharer in his success, now as much as she ever can — there's nothing to stop her, Mibb."

But Mibb did not answer because put that way there was no answer. And because the truism always holds: When you cannot answer your opponent's argument do not despair, you can still call him names, she began making fun of Mary Wood.

Mary was pulling a bit bewilderedly at her handkerchief, her eyes downcast.

"I'm perfectly willing to be considered — old-fashioned," she said brokenly. "If you want to call it that. I'm perfectly willing — to take any chances on being happy — in my own way — that way that I've said. I haven't any desire to be a man — not in the slightest. I can't see why a woman's place in the world — doing a woman's work — keeping a home — raising little children to be good men and women in turn — isn't just as important and noble as anything a man could do — outside that home. No, I can't see why a woman shouldn't be satisfied — and look upon her work as a privilege. I'm willing to take my chances in life with my belief. It can lead me where it will!"

When at last they came to continue on their way back to town, the five of them were very thoughtful. Mibb walked behind — alone.

“Don’t feel badly over it,” Jack said soothingly to the girl on his arm. “It isn’t worth crying over — what she says, Mary. She’ll see she’s mistaken some day, Mary. You’re — you’re noble, Mary!” — he paid the compliment with difficulty — “and I hope — the man — who marries you stays big enough to know it.”

That night the boy lay on his bed sleeplessly through many hours, thinking over what had occurred and the things which had been discussed between them that evening. Boys and girls do not discuss things in that way in these barren days on which we have fallen. “She’s one girl in a thousand,” he muttered miserably. “If I lose her — if I don’t marry her — I’ll never, never know another like her again.”

Gray dawn stole up over the eastern mountains and found him still awake, tossing fretfully on his bed.

CHAPTER XI

AND SO, HAVING PLACED THE HEROES AND HEROINES AND THE VILLAINESSES OF OUR STORY WHO ARE TO WORK OUT THEIR DESTINY AS TIME GOES ON, WE COME TO THE MEMORABLE PICNIC UP IN BLAISDELL'S GLEN AND EVENING IN GOLD-PIECE CABIN.

AT the office the talk was of the picnic up the Glen that afternoon, — a celebration for the success of the local talent play.

The ex-players met on the Opera House steps. The girls had generous baskets of which the boys relieved them as they arrived with awkward greetings meant to be funny and at which the girls laughed as they were supposed to laugh. Quickly they paired off: Jack and Mary; Mibb and Slug Truman; Sam Hod and Alice; Harriet Babcock and Frank Whitcomb; even Georgie Griffin and the Whalen girl were there — the latter brought her pathetic addition to the refreshments done in a paper parcel. Then as they were about to start, Dick Robinson and Grace Rawlins arrived from different directions.

"I'm the odd one!" greeted Mrs. Whipple.
"You'll just make partners!"

The crowd laughed and Dick colored, glowering darkly at Truman in possession of Mibb's basket. The thirteen moved up Main Street and eastward out of the village toward the East Wickford road,

Mrs. Whipple walking with Grace and Dick, and Dick carrying two baskets.

"Why is it called Gold-Piece Glen and Gold-Piece Cabin?" Jack asked Truman as they walked on ahead.

"Years ago when they mined for iron around these parts there was an old chap lived up in the Glen," replied Herbert, "who turned all his wages into gold pieces. He hid them somewhere in his cabin. They called him Gold-Piece Blaisdell. He died a dozen years ago, — from injuries when two tramps broke into the place. They found his hoard in an earthen vessel buried under the fireplace. The governor bought the Glen to lumber the chestnut a year afterward and I fixed up the old Cabin. I stay up there in the deer season or whenever I have a hankering to take to the woods."

"And is the old earthen pot still buried?"

"Yep," answered Slug Truman.

"Do you know where?"

"Yep; I'll show you when we get up there. We'll build a fire in the fireplace — Frank's got his violin — we'll have a great time — and the moon's going to be full to-night — full for the last time this month. It'll be a great walk home!" He glanced sadly at Mary Wood. He was trying hard to bear his disappointment like a dead game sport.

They wended their laughing, joking, coquetting way out School Street and past the gas works. They passed the County Farm and turned toward East Wickford. As the whistles back in the village were blowing six, they came to the "turning-off place", as Slug termed it, and passed over the Truman land and climbed up into the Glen.

A thousand country scents, of sweet fern and briar

bloom and blossoming laurel, of blackberry vine and checkerberry and wild apple — made the beautiful evening air sensuous with rustic fragrance. Through the raspberry that scratched at their clothes and the milkweed that left lint upon them, through grasses that were already beginning to grow damp and little swarms of insects which winged and fell on the quiet atmosphere, they moved along the well-worn path and up under the tall silent trees to where the cabin stood in the shadows.

The picnic was not unlike a thousand other picnics between boys and girls in love that have taken place since the world began. Grace Rawlins wanted to know how Slug ever had the nerve to invite them up to such a dirty hole and it just went to show what brutes men were at heart when they got away from women; and a few minutes later she wanted to know why they'd brought so much food; what did they think they had to feed, an army? But Slug built a fire in the low fireplace and they boiled their coffee and the food was laid out over the big plank table. The boys held back and had to be handed their sandwiches and coffee and then, having been thus given a start, they forgot when it was time to stop and massacred the refreshments. Slug — as clumsy as a plow horse — upset a cup of coffee on Alice Whiting's dress and in helping her remove the mess got in a back-fire motion and sent a jar of pickle the other way over Mibb. Grace Rawlins said some one ought to have brought along a martingale for him or umbrellas for the crowd. The Whalen girl did the most work getting things ready and then began to weep inwardly because she hadn't brought near enough food for herself and Georgie Griffin, too, because, poor girl, she

didn't have it to bring. But Georgie had no scruples about whose food it was and "pitched in."

It was a joyous happy meal in the woods where nature gives zest to youthful appetite and much harmless courting was to come, — which was even better than the food.

Then as the Glen darkened outside and an occasional mosquito winged in the open doorway and dined off a plump wrist or ankle, and the stars came out, and the Glen was made weird by mysterious night noises, the table with the wreckage of edibles was moved back and the boys lighted their pipes and found places for themselves and their girls around the fire that Slug had coaxed and poked until it was a thing of joy and romance and comfort.

Mibb sat on the floor with her head against Slug's knees — and in a corner beside the Rawlins girl, whom he detested for her uncomfortable tongue, Dick looked as miserable and kept as quiet and inconspicuous as a puppy that is ailing grievously.

Harriet was seated beside the Truman boy, Frank Whitcomb was sprawled out in front of her, his big feet silhouetted against the flames, his head in the girl's lap. Sam and Alice were over on the left — and behind the crowd, seemingly not of it, were Jack Purse and Mary Wood. Jack had stolen his arm about Mary's waist and Mary did not resent the intimacy.

Why repeat the talk — the jests, the repartee, the foolery and the clumsy sallies at one another — that followed on that evening? Every man and every woman on God's footstool who has ever been young and loved has been present at such an outing and knows the talk thereof.

Finally Frank Whitcomb produced his violin

from its battered old black case and tuned it and laid aside his pipe and began to play — “Oft In the Stilly Night”, “The Light of Other Days”, and “Auld Robin Gray”, and many more of the old-time favorites. They were silent a long time after Fred had finished playing. The boys’ pipes had gone out. It seemed as though all of them, under the spell of the hour and the place and the music, had caught a glimpse of the future and had been made solemn and thoughtful and a bit afraid.

“Wonder,” said Slug suddenly in a tone that was strange for that easygoing, loose-habited young fellow, “where this crowd will be all of us — twenty or thirty years from to-night?”

Indeed Truman had voiced the feeling in the hearts of them all. And they could not reply. Just at the moment their hearts were too full to reply.

“I suppose,” answered Sam lightly, “some of us will be married and have families — some of us will have made successes of our lives and made money or won fame — and some of us — maybe — will — be — dead! perhaps many years dead!”

There was a strange quiet in the cabin. Even Mibb was sobered and looked into the flames with staring eyes. It came to them that moment, as a reaction from the foolery of that hour that had gone, how aptly Sam had spoken. Yes, the spell of the hour, the place and the music was indeed upon them. But there was more. There was the mystery of life and living and the thoughtless heart of youth made suddenly thoughtful.

Herb Truman spoke again. His tone was strange to those who knew him well. He seemed musing aloud on what Sam had said:

“Yes, some’ll have families and some’ll be rich

and some'll be famous. But I wonder which of us will be the most successful — just plain downright successful — never mind what our work in life happens to be?"

"Successful?" asked Mibb. "What do you mean by successful?"

"Just successful," replied Slug doggedly. "I call success wherein we've done the things we set ourselves to do, to the best that's in us."

"You talk like a preacher," declared Mibb. "I didn't know it was in you!"

Indeed, neither did the rest of them. And in that time — perhaps the first and last and only time — the Truman boy showed what really lay within him, the manner of man he might have been if he had not been handicapped, cruelly handicapped, first by lack of a mother, second by the woman whom he married. There are folk in our town who have only harsh words for Herbert Truman for the things which subsequently happened. Verily they judged cruelly from circumstantial evidence. They never took the trouble nor were given the opportunity to gaze down into the boy's soul and learn of the stuff of which it was made.

They discussed success with the thoughtfulness of youth; for half an hour they talked of solemn things, for they were on the threshold, some of them of solemn things, for there is some truth to the proverb that coming events cast their shadows before. Then, — for what reason not one in that party ever found out, though they debated over it through all maturity — Slug felt in the pocket of his waistcoat and pulled out a coin.

"A twenty-dollar gold piece," said he. "Just had an idea. Going to propose something funny."

"Funny? Don't break the charm of the hour and the atmosphere," said Mary Wood.

"It's funny and it isn't," answered Slug. "Here's a twenty-dollar gold-piece I say. Carried it as a pocket piece for a couple of years. I'll donate it for the purpose. Let's do something unusual with it—to remember this picnic by. Let's bury it!"

"Bury it!"

"In old Gold-Piece Blaisdell's pot here under the fireplace. Let's put it away—for twenty or thirty years. Then twenty or thirty years—whatever number of years we agree on—from to-night, let us that are living and physically able to do so, come back here to Gold-Piece Cabin if it's standing, and dig up this coin!"

"Why dig it up—then?" asked Jack Purse.

"Dig it up—and present it to the one of us who has made the biggest success of his life."

"Why?"

"Sort of a medal of honor from the rest of us—the crowd we used to go around with—a tribute, a sort of an admission—that while some of us have become successful, there's some one person here who will be more successful than all the others. This medal they can keep for the rest of their lives—a medal, as I say—of honor!"

"A crazy idea!" scoffed Grace Rawlins.

"It's not a crazy idea!" contradicted Frank Whitcomb. "It's bully!"

Several times as Herb was digging up the brick from the hearth, to get to the miser's earthen pot below, Mibb looked at him queerly. Verily it was a different Herb disclosed for the moment than she had ever known before.

"In thirty years there won't be any gold-piece that's recognizable," suggested Grace Rawlins.

"Gold stands the test of time," replied Sam. "But it might be better if we had something to protect it. Who's got a pocket match-safe they don't mind donating to posterity?"

It developed that the only match-safe in the crowd belonged to Dick Robinson.

Slug found the brick, dug it loose, lifted it and discovered the musty cavity.

"Here goes!" he declared. "Which shall it be — twenty or thirty years?" he asked as he dropped the medal into the thin German silver match-box with a sharp brief jingle.

"This old shack won't be standing in thirty years!" croaked Grace. "It's a waste of good money!"

"Which shall it be — twenty or thirty years?" repeated Slug again.

"Make it thirty," suggested Sam.

"Thirty it is!" declared Truman, enjoying the unique prank and his part in it.

With all leaning forward and looking on, into the earthen cavity Slug laid it almost reverently. Then he carefully set the brick.

"Thirty years from to-night — the seventeenth of May, eighteen hundred and eighty six," he said. "I — wonder — which of us it will go to then. Thirty years from to-night! — that will be the seventeenth of May, nineteen hundred and sixteen."

CHAPTER XII

A SOMEWHAT GRUESOME CHAPTER AT THE END OF WHICH OUR SOLICITUDE FOR THE WOOD GIRL MOUNTS TO GRAVE CONCERN.

THEY did not go home together on that night. Eight-thirty found Jack and Mary alone on the hilltop that overlooks Paris on the east. Amid the country quiet, in the depth of evening, the boy took the girl in his arms and together they watched the stars come out, and heard the frogs begin their piping along the banks of the river.

"Oh, Jack, it's such a long time to wait — until you pay the debts — four thousand dollars' worth of them. I try to keep up a brave front, Jack. But when I get out a paper and pencil and figure for myself, it makes me — it makes me — a coward."

"There'll be a way out somehow," he said hopefully. "I don't expect to pay up four thousand dollars out of my wages on the paper. I'm only trying to show the creditors I'm on the level by paying them what I can while I'm waiting for my opportunity. The opportunity will come sooner or later and that doesn't mean I'm content, Micawber fashion, to idly wait for something to turn up. I'm doing a pile of thinking these days, Mary."

"Oh, Jack, if there was only some way that I could help!"

"You are helping, right now! You don't half know how much!"

The stars grew brighter. The piping of the frogs grew louder. Night indeed was upon them.

"I wonder," he said after the manner of the poet which he was, as they saw the lights begin to appear in the homes dotting the valley floor below them and thought of what Herbert had done that night, "I wonder what life holds for you and me, Mary? If we could look into the future I wonder what we would see there; I wonder how different we might be planning to-night?"

He pressed the girl's hand, the hand with the slender fingers which looked so frail and were destined to do so much in the years that came afterward. When we of the *Telegraph* office think of Jack that night out on Bancroft's hill, pressing the girl's delicate hand and thinking of what the years might bring, we seem to feel a sadness which all the glories of those intervening years and all the pleasures and successes cannot assuage.

They came back to town late that night, his arm about her shoulders, hers about his waist. They walked slowly, each occupied with his own thoughts, bareheaded, the sweet wild scents of night country enveloping them.

"It's such a long time to wait, Jack, such a long time to wait. And I want you so!"

"Yes," he said. "I'll do my best. God being my witness, I will!"

Where the inlet runs up into Morse's pasture the frogs were chorusing particularly loud.

"Oh Jack, I can't help thinking of how I heard them the night I left home. A year ago! Oh, how short the time has been." A little later she said: "Poor mother! We must drive out to the place Sunday and see if she is all right and wants

for anything. She must have it brought to her how happy — and miserable — I am!”

“Yes,” said Jack absently, his thoughts on another problem, “we will drive out there Sunday.” A quarter-mile further on he said between his teeth: “I’ve either got to get hold of a paper of my own or I’ve got to look around for some other business! I’ve just got to make some money!” He said it as though he had discovered something new under the sun.

“Jack! You wouldn’t leave the *Telegraph* office! I somehow couldn’t work there if you left.”

“You can help me by being patient, dear,” he said.

“Don’t know which is harder, Jack, to be the one who has the responsibility of making good or the one who must remain quiet and patient while the other strives to realize his ambition!”

He bade her good-night at her gate and left for Ma Henderson’s boarding place with her kiss burning upon his lips.

At nine o’clock that following morning Sam Hod came into the back room. There was tragedy in his expressive eyes; his face was pale.

“Jack,” he directed, “come into the front office.”

Purse followed Sam.

The editor closed the doors and turned to the young man.

“Son, you love Mary Wood, don’t you?”

“Yes.” The boy flushed but he was not ashamed.

“I knew it. I want to see the girl happy. Jack, forget this absurdity about paying up all your father’s bills. The court has absolved you from any such nonsense. Go get that girl, make her put on her things and take a holiday with you. Get one of Uncle Joe Fodder’s rigs, drive off to some of the little

towns roundabout and get married. Do it quickly, right now, without losing another moment!"

"Mr. Hod, what's the matter? What's happened?"

"I advise you to do it for the sake of the girl herself. I pity her; I want to know she's got a good boy like you to look out for her and comfort her."

"Comfort her? Why?"

"Boy, Henry Osgood has just driven in here from the Cobb Hill district. He says he has only seen Sheriff Crumpett, Doctor Johnson the coroner and myself. The town don't know it yet. You can get Mary out and away and give her something to mitigate the blow —"

"Mr. Hod!" The boy's voice was a hoarse whisper. "Tell me what has happened. If it's about her folks, I can comfort and help her just as though we were already married —"

"Silent Wheeler's gone and done it at last!"

"Done what?"

"Will you go get the girl and move her out of this for the day? Marry her? I'll raise your wages to eighteen a week."

"Mr. Hod, I can't, I can't! Don't you see how it is? I had something to do with some of the men putting money into our newspaper. I've got to square with them or be a cad in my own heart. I can't marry Mary right now although my heart's about broke over it. Tell me straight; what has Silent Wheeler done?"

Sam told him.

The boy went out into the back room.

"Mary," he said, ill himself from the thing which he must do, "come out with me for an hour."

She raised her face to his with such a look of wonder and innocence that his heart smote him so he almost cried aloud.

“Why?”

“I want to talk to you! Please come,” he begged.

She laid down her composing stick, slipped off her apron, washed her hands at the little iron sink in the corner and took down the big black straw hat behind the door. She followed him into the morning sunshine.

On the morning of the thirty-first of May, 1883, our little Vermont town was shocked by news of a revolting crime.

On top the big green safe which stands in a corner of our office are piled the bound files of our newspaper covering four decades. They are more or less accurate and certainly a most detailed history of our community history in all those years.

Referring to those files for the refreshment of memory, accuracy of date and the proper chronology, those volumes of battered calf on which every cub reporter has left uncountable thumb marks profit us as follows:

About half-past six of May 30, of that year, Mrs. Henry Osgood, who lived on a farm adjacent, was returning from the exercises of the G. A. R. in Foxboro Center. She drove her old white horse in at the Wheeler place and was about to alight when she heard cries of terror coming from within.

She hesitated to alight from her muddy old buggy and in that moment of hesitation caught sight of a face—a woman’s face—in one of the side windows, distorted with agony or terror. Being alone, badly startled herself, she belabored her old

white horse and started down the road to McDermott's before she realized that because of the holiday McDermott's would be deserted. Thus she lost a valuable ten minutes.

There were no men at her own home that afternoon; the nearest farm was the Adams place, six miles to the north. She was about to start off across a weed-grown cross-road for help from Gilberts Mills when Joel Sibley and Ed Dickinson came along in Joel's buckboard. The two men returned with her.

The Wheeler place was ominously quiet. The men explored cautiously.

Ed came back.

"Gawd!" he ejaculated. "There's enough blood on the floor o' the side bedroom to float a boat. And it's fresh blood! On your life, Mis' Osgood, don't you go in!"

"It's a job for Sheriff Crumpett!" declared Joel. "Either old Graveyard Wheeler's killed his woman, or she's killed him."

"But where's the bodies?"

"I don't know and I ain't got the stomach to look. But one or t'other is somewheres in this house, and from the looks o' things, when they're found they won't be nice to look at. Who goes for Crumpett, you or us?"

"I'll go!" announced Mrs. Osgood.

Sheriff Crumpett from Foxboro Center was a Grand Army man and was found just as he was leaving G. A. R. hall. It was dark, the house was eery, when three buggies came along the road and turned sharply into the Wheeler yard with the sheriff in the lead. They had lanterns. They entered by the kitchen door, viewed the evidences

of tragedy in the side bedroom and began their gruesome search of the premises. It was a task for strong nerves.

They searched for two hours and found nothing but the huge blood stain drying into the matting.

"I saw Mis' Wheeler's face at the sittin'-room window, clear as day!" swore Mrs. Henry Osgood. "And she looked murdered already."

"We'll have to wait for daylight and search the farm," said Sheriff Crumpett.

Dawn came between half-past three and four o'clock. They sauntered out in the gray of the misty morning and resumed the hunt.

Between five and six o'clock Ed Dickinson tried to draw some water from the well in the yard. The bucket hung to the sweep failed to work properly. Investigating, as the sun came up and daylight filtered down into the deep regions of the well, he caught sight of something which brought a hoarse, excited cry and his companions on a run and explained why their night's search of the premises had been fruitless.

Scarcely had this awful thing been found and the first shock of it passed, than one of the Osgood boys, on going into the lower cow barn to water the neglected and noisy stock, made a second discovery that completed the tragedy.

Three minutes later the stiffened hulk of Silent Wheeler was cut down by the steady hand of Sheriff Crumpett from a beam over an empty stall where it had hung through the hours of the night at the end of an old tierope. Neck and head were twisted and stiffened rakishly. Hen Osgood said afterward that Wheeler's corpse reminded him of an old rat removed from a trap the morning after.

It was a typical country tragedy of those days, the logical sequel of conditions which the daily newspaper, the telephone and the low-priced automobile are happily ameliorating. But for a month and a day it was the chief topic of conversation in the grocery stores, sewing circles and blacksmith shops of the county or wherever two or three were gathered together in small-town, back-country intercourse.

The woman with the terribly reddened hands had paid the price of being a farmer's wife, of marrying a man whose idea of a "woman" was a chattel, an appliance to help him run his farm successfully.

At the request of the prostrated stepdaughter the "authorities" (meaning the Foxboro selectmen) assumed charge of the idiot whom Sheriff Crumpett and his aids had not overlooked in that bare upper room the night they hunted the place, and the boy Artie was lodged temporarily in a private asylum at the expense of the town, for our State at the time had none of those model institutions for the treatment of such cases which it has since acquired.

Silent Wheeler's brothers appeared from the four corners of the county, and after making arrangements for the most inexpensive burial possible, like selfish, provincial, hill-town buzzards, started dividing the Wheeler effects. Thereat the probate court stepped in — meaning Judge Farmer in Paris — and appointed old Short-Cramp Truman as Silent Wheeler's executor. Between the "authorities", the sullen bickering brothers, the bereaved stepdaughter, Jack Purse, Sam Hod and Doctor Dodd of the Calvary Methodist church the funeral was held, the two pitifully plain caskets lowered into a double grave and the crime became a thing of small-town history.

Observations and comment of representative local people — mostly female — on the affair may be introduced here as appropriate and fitting into the warp and woof of our narrative.

At the Ladies Home Missionary Sewing Circle at Mrs. Dexter Merritt's the following Thursday afternoon the following is of record :

Mrs. Blake Whipple, wife of our local undertaker, who frequently assisted her husband in times of professional rush and who enjoyed something of a reputation as a business woman prone to place more value on the shekels than on sentiment — fitting attributes perhaps for an undertaker's spouse — took a temperamentally commercial view of the occurrence. She said she regretted Blake had really went and put so much effort on making 'em ready for the fun'ral because Short-Cramp Truman, the vinegar-blooded old scoundrel, had beat him down on his bill as usual and Blake was too honest to make out the bill for double the price and thus compromise on what he originally expected.

Which lugubrious line of intercourse prompted Mrs. Felix Taylor to inquire if any present supposed that whoever bought the property would relish drinkin' the well water after Sarah had been fished out from it, and Mrs. Fred Bellows to declare that she wouldn't live in that Cobb Hill house after the crime which had been committed there for a million dollars and twenty-three cents per night. Thus by due process of small-town elimination the conversation came around to Mary Wood.

"I understand," advanced Mrs. Gaylord Miller, "that she's engaged to the Purse boy at the newspaper office but they can't get married because the Purse boy is deep in debt."

"It's too bad the house is haunted," assumed Mrs. Merritt, "or at least has got such gruesome associations, because it really ain't so far away from Paris but what them two could marry and live there without havin' no rent to pay and make up the sum for the boy's debts."

"But she couldn't do that," declared Judge Farmer's wife. "John said in my hearin' that the place and furniture and tools and stock would have to be put up to auction. That's the law!"

"Yet if Mary's goin' to get the money from it after the estate's settled, why does the law go to all that bother?" Mrs. Howard wanted to know. "Why not just turn it over to her and let her marry who she pleases and live there without all that fuss and expense?"

"She ain't goin' to get the money from it," went on Mrs. Farmer, looking very important as she imparted her legal knowledge as became the wife of our leading barrister and judge of probate. "The law don't take no account o' stepchildren and Mary's a stepchild. The crazy boy Artie is the only heir. The money'll be spent for his keep. The Lord knows taxes is high enough in the Foxboros without folks over there havin' to pay for his confinement in no madhouse when there's money available if only took. I hear Short-Cramp Truman's goin' to send him away to some place down in Massachusetts."

"Then Mary doesn't get anything?" demanded Mrs. David Dodd, the minister's wife.

"Why should she? Let her marry the Purse boy and have him support her."

"Yes," added Mrs. Elisha Porter, twice married and reasonably willing to try it again. "At her age I was married and had two offspring!"

Everybody always hastened to head Mrs. Elisha Porter off when she started in on her "offspring" because in all the State of Vermont there were no other "offspring" as remarkable as Mrs. Elisha Porter's. So Mrs. Dodd said quickly :

"But it's kind of rough on the poor little thing. And she's already had such a hard girlhood ! It's a wonder to me she's the sweet, gentle little body that she is and not more like — some other unfortunates in this town that could be helped more than they are."

"Mibb Henderson?" inquired Mrs. Taylor.

"Yes," declared the minister's wife in righteous indignation. "Mibb Henderson !"

"But I dare say that Mibb will take care of herself and make a better marriage than the Wood girl," commented Mrs. Miller.

General silence followed, broken only by the click of knitting needles or the snip of shears. It was to be expected that Mrs. Dodd would stand up for the stepdaughter. It was entirely consistent with her husband's profession. As for the others, the fact that Silent Wheeler had done the thing which he had, reduced him to that status of general misapprobation where it was perfectly permissible for these good women to air themselves after the tenor of their souls. The strange feature was that not one of the dozen or more had a single good word to say for the woman with the terribly reddened hands. But those who know New England can recognize that this was not because they felt no compassion for her whose life was done. It was because each and every one of them realized the mockery which marriage far too often was for country women, and their reticence and indifference was that of trying to sup-

pose that no such conditions existed because they were never brought into conversation.

"I suppose Mary Wood knows she ain't got nothin' comin' to her?" This from Mrs. Miller, directed to the Judge's wife, who was the legal authority of the dozen.

Mrs. Farmer was a long time replying.

"That's the pitiful part of it," she said finally. "It's the job which my husband and Mr. Truman hate most to bring themselves to do. She don't dream of such a thing; she was over to Mrs. Seaver's yesterday to see about havin' a black dress made to wear in the newspaper office and she said that the least she could do was to keep the home as near as possible like it was when her mother left it."

CHAPTER XIII

SLUG TRUMAN CONTINUES TO BE A SPORT BUT
COMES ON A SAD ERRAND.

MARY sat on the side porch of the Cobb Hill place, looking over the tops of the gnarled trees in the lower orchard at the far-flung valley below. The countryside was leafing out more luxuriously with each passing week, into the deep calm greens of mid summer.

She had bought herself some cheap black stuff at the Bon Ton store and Mrs. Amos Seaver, who did "dressmaking reasonable", had fashioned it into a mourning dress. Her dark hair was gathered low at the back of her head. Her face held an unhealthy pallor, and her dark wistful eyes were reddened with traces of many tears.

It was hard for her to realize as she sat on the steps that the stepfather was dead, that he would never sit more by the kitchen fire during the long evenings, eternally brooding, nursing the poker, lifting the warped red covers and spitting with sharp hisses into the stove. It was hard to believe that the long, anxious evening hours, when her mother awaited his homecoming with the greenish fire smouldering in his inhuman eyes, were over for all time. But it was hardest to realize that she would never see her mother again. The bitterest part of her sorrow was that she had been able to go home but four times in the brief year which had

passed, that her mother had seen Jack but once, that the inability to get home because of finances or transportation was tantamount to neglect and that the woman had gone with no one at hand to help her. And yet she had gone and was out of her earthly Golgotha. That was something.

About the place were a hundred evidences of the man who had died so terribly, — and of her mother's personality. At the edge of a narrow, newly-planted garden by the fence she saw a trowel which had been laid down by her mother's hand but a few days, not over a week bygone. A couple of her mother's big white hens came leisurely around the corner of the house, searching philosophically for grubs, crooning to themselves and darting forward at a fly together. Tom Tinker, the big tiger cat who had purred in her mother's lap and kept her company on many lonesome evenings, came out of the shed door, started across the yard and stopped midway, catlike, to scratch a particularly inaccessible spot on his anatomy. Two of the Holsteins were browsing along down in the lower lane and toward the barnyard bars as the sun sank lower. It seemed strange the homely little world she had known from girlhood could be so much the same and yet so different.

She tried to think out her plans for the future. If Jack would have accepted the money, she would have brought herself to sell the place and use the proceeds in his financial predicament. But he had scolded her for thinking of such a thing. She thought that she could get one of the Osgood boys to work the farm for her and get enough out of it to keep up the taxes and help out their finances after she and Jack were married. She was thankful that

old Peter Whipple at the bank had refused her stepfather a mortgage on the place last year when he wanted cash to take over the Perkins woodlot. At least she did not have that mortgage to worry over and pay.

She was trying to think of some man and wife who might be glad of the opportunity to live at the place and run it for her when she heard the rumble of buggy wheels and the click of steel tires in the sand on the other side of the wall and the maples. The next instant a spirited horse spanked into the yard, his hoofs becoming immediately noiseless as he stepped on the short-cropped lawn.

She was expecting Jack to come out after work and return to the village with her, for her finances demanded that she be back at her typcase in the morning. But it was unusual that Jack should have hired a livery rig.

Then she recognized the horse before she recognized the driver, for the driver's body was momentarily obscured by the little animal's head. It was Monday-Washing.

"Herbert!" she said, arising.

He fastened the mare to the hammock ring in the corner of the house. He came across and took her trembling, outstretched hand, pulling off his cap as he did so and freeing the mammoth cowlick which seemed surprised to find itself uncovered and rose up as much as to say: "Well, and whereabouts in the world is this place, anyhow?"

"I went to Mis' Mather's place and asked for you, and she said you were out here to your folks's place gatherin' up some things. So I just come on out —"

"I'm glad you did, Herbert. I don't know any

one whom I would rather see just now than yourself, excepting —”

“I understand,” he said. It was one time when he did not “put his foot in it.”

She placed a big armchair for him on the porch and sat down opposite.

“It come kind o’ sudden an — tough, didn’t it?”

“Yes,” she said.

The conversation lagged. He tortured his hat.

“I — come — on business for my father. It’s about your estate.”

A little fear stabbed in the girl’s heart. Like all country people she had a nameless dread of that great, all-powerful, oftentimes cruel thing known as the Law. And “business” and “estate” were terms of law. The pallor on her face deepened as she waited for Slug to make his errand known.

“Yes?” she prompted faintly.

But Slug was in no hurry.

“You — you think a lot of Purse, don’t you, Mary?” He did not wait for her to make a painful reply. “I see you do and that for me it ain’t no use. I guess I warn’t cut out to have the kind o’ wife such as you. A sportin’ man don’t cry over spilt milk nor when the cards goes against him. And life’s more or less of a sportin’ proposition, anyhow, but love is a stacked deck! Oh, hell!”

He did not mean to be coarse. The exclamation came from his heart.

“Herbert —”

“Why don’t you marry him, Mary? Is it true that he’s payin’ up debts the law don’t require him to pay?”

“Yes.”

“He wouldn’t do that unless he was more than on

the level — I don't think. I'm glad if I can't have you, that a chap's going to be your man who's like that. I'll — feel — safer."

"You'll feel safer!"

"I'd hate to think o' you married to a man that grew to be like your stepfather was — at least what the town believed."

The girl turned her face away.

"Mary, there's a lot o' jokin' about a girl bein' a 'sister' to a man after she's give him the mitten. But — I sort o' wish — seein' I'm cut out by Jack Purse that you'd look on me same as a brother."

"Herbert," she said after a painful interval, "I hope it will make you happy to know that I've thought of you that way from the night when you first invited me into your house. Maybe that's why I let you — kiss — me — and yet didn't come to think of you quite like I've come to think of Jack."

"Then you don't mind talkin' about yourself to me?" he asked after the ruination of the cap was nearly completed. "Not so long as I mean it all right?"

"What can I possibly say, Herbert?"

"Mary, ain't you got no folks nowhere that could give you a hand in this scrape?"

"No," she replied. "Both my mother's brothers were killed at Malvern Hill. My stepfather's folks have no interest in me nor have I any claim on them; I wouldn't press it even if I had. My own father had a couple of brothers; one of them went out to Kansas and was killed by the Indians. There's one left still, I think, — Uncle Josiah who was last heard from in Chicago. I'm — pretty — much — alone; that is, excepting for you and Jack."

"Mary, — ain't there no way I could help you?"

"No, Herbert," she said with sudden grimness in her voice. "This happens to be one of those times in life when we just have to shut our teeth and stiffen our will power and face our problems and solve them for ourselves. I don't ask pity. I don't ask charity. All I want is friendship — and a fair chance to work and live and be happy with those I love. The shock of losing mother was awful; naturally I feel badly and will continue to feel badly for a long time. But perhaps I've been sent all the hard experiences of my girlhood to make me strong for the battle royal I've got alongside Jack now; perhaps there'll come a day when I'll understand why my way wasn't made easy up to now and be thankful because the experiences I've had made me strong and self-reliant and poised and equipped to fight that battle alongside the man I marry — to make me the proper wife for him. I'm not feeling sorry a bit for myself; it's Jack and mother — and you — that I'm feeling sorry for. As for myself — I'll manage somehow!"

"Mary, if ever the time comes when you need me — same as you might need a brother —"

"Thank you — deeply, sincerely, from the bottom of my heart, Herbert."

"I just come out here to give you a letter that dad wanted I should see you got. That's the business I meant about your estate."

"A letter?"

She took the long envelope in a hand that trembled nervously. She carefully undid the flap and read the enclosure. One hand held the letter before her. The other fumbled in her waist. It found her small lace handkerchief. The handkerchief was suddenly

pressed tightly against her lips. Then the letter was lowered, the face with the handkerchief held tightly against it, averted. As she got to her feet, Short-Cramp's message fluttered out onto the lawn.

"What's the trouble, Mary?"

In a voice which was an effort to keep from breaking and betraying her brave words of a moment before, she said :

"Your father has just sent word that I mustn't touch nor carry away anything from here but my mother's and my own personal property. He says — the law doesn't recognize anybody but Artie as the heir — step-children don't count."

"It's hard, Mary. I've known it from the first. But don't blame the Governor. He didn't make the law."

"I thought — I thought — maybe I was going to have the place and —"

"It's got to be auctioned," the boy stated miserably.

Independence Day arrived. Five weeks slipped away and came August sixteenth, the annual observance of the Battle of Bennington and a Vermont holiday. The leaves and bowered country had lost the virility of summer freshness. They were dusty and faded and gradually streaked with yellow and brown. Time was going relentlessly along into another autumn. The village housewives began covering their rose bushes and flower beds with sheeting and papers at night to preserve their beauty for a few weeks longer.

Canny old Truman and the other two dummy executors decided to wait until after the crops were in before holding the Wheeler auction. The farm-

ers would then have time and money to make the sale a financial success.

It came one day early in Indian summer. Jack found the girl on that night of the Wheeler sale down in the lower orchard. She had no other place to go. She had climbed up on the hoary, gnarled old arm of the russet apple-tree, the only one in the orchard, — the place where as a little girl she had played through violet vistaed hours with her dolls. There was no one to comfort her, no one left from those Other Years but the old russet apple-tree. And soon — all too soon — that would be but a memory.

A few feet away was the hole in the stone wall where she had first seen the little Haskins boy who had played with her for a little time and then moved away and grown up and become a minister and gone as a missionary to India. Where was he now, and did he ever think of the girl on the adjoining farm in Foxboro who had dared to follow him through the hole in the stone wall under boulders that might easily slide off and crush them? She wondered.

Over between the two scrawny astrachan trees was the big boulder where she had always sought safety from the wicked knives of the mowing machine when they cut the grass in the orchard. She had played mud pies there with Nellie Harrington, who came down from the Harrington place which had burned years and years ago and was now only a blackberry-grown cellar hole and a stump of brick chimney. Nellie had married one of the Blodgett boys and died with the coming of a little child.

A score of old familiar things she saw: The one pure white stone in the wall where on a winter's day she had come face to face with a fox; the outline of

the frog-pond in the swamp where some men had once shot an ailing horse; the bars into the wood lot where the youngest Osgood boy had started a fire with stolen matches and nearly ruined a township; raspberry and blackberry bushes where she had watched for the first autumn fruit to ripen. Every feature of the landscape had its associations.

"Old apple-tree! — dear old russet apple-tree!" she choked. "I'm going away now and I can't come back any more. You have always seemed human to me. Will you remember the little girl who played dolls here, and brought cookies and sugared bread-and-butter here, and came here for solace when she had been punished for some disobedience of childhood? Will you remember her, old apple-tree, — and think of her as having gone out into the world from this day a woman?"

A breeze blowing over the valley stirred the branches. It seemed as though the tree had replied. She stole her arms about its battered scaly trunk and placed her fair face close against its surface.

Her face was streaming tears when Jack came upon her.

"Mary," he said with a wonderful tenderness in his rebuke, "you promised you weren't going to the auction to-day; you said you were going to stay with the Osgoods until after the agony was over. That's why I worked at the office. Otherwise I should have tried to be with you."

She slipped off the apple-tree's low bough as a little child climbs down from the knee of an aged grandparent, — slipped down and stood before her lover with her back against the tree.

He looked into her face and he knew what she had that day suffered and was suffering now.

"Mary!" he said huskily.

"I never felt more lonely in my life than I do now, Jack," she said. "Up to now I have been only a girl. After this I'm a woman, — a woman and alone. A man can be alone and lonely and not mind, but a lonely woman is the most miserable creature in God's world."

"Mary," he said, "I've been talking to Mr. Hod. He was at the auction you know, and he saw you. He made me come out early and — and — take care of you. Mary, dear, I'm alone, too. I'm alone and in debt. I have my own way to make, my living to earn under a handicap. You know what that handicap is and what it means. But Mary, since this has happened, since you too have been left alone, since my talk with Mr. Hod and his kindness to me, I've come to realize what it means for you and I to try to solve this problem alone and apart. I—I want you, Mary. I want you to help and encourage me; to work with me; to be at home when I come there at night after trying to fight my way ahead in the day. I want to feel that nothing is going to part us but — death. I want you to marry me, Mary, — marry me and fight with me, and share with me the glory of winning the victory. Perhaps I have no right to ask it. I'm a poor man. But we are both alone and poor now. Why should it be any harder to fight our way together than separately — and alone?"

"It would be — easier — Jack!"

"Will you marry me, Mary?"

"When?" she asked fearfully.

"Now!" he said. "To-night! Mr. Hod said — and I see how truly he knew — that you would need me to-night, especially. Oh, Mary! I — love —

you! I want you! Come with me and let's live — together!"

Under the old apple-tree where she had played with her dolls and brought spiced cookies and dried her childhood tears and fell on many golden afternoons a-dreaming with books of lords and fine ladies and knight-errants and charming princes spread before her but forgotten, she told him that she would marry him — that night.

CHAPTER XIV

AND SO THEY WERE MARRIED — BUT DID THEY
LIVE HAPPILY EVER AFTER AS THE STORY BOOKS
HAVE HAD IT SINCE THE DAYS WHEN THE OLD
EARTH WAS YOUNG?

LIFE holds many mysteries, but among them is none greater than this : That the lives of some folk should lead into pleasant places and beside still waters, that most of their troubles should be small ones, that their days should be filled with pleasure and their nights with untroubled slumber. And that there should be other folk, in no way responsible, for whom existence is a pathway through many shadows, for whom many of the most enjoyable of life's experiences are denied, whose days are filled with endless labor and evenings with heartache.

These are the things understood only by those who with clean hands and a pure heart aspire to the secret places of the Most High : That there is a Glory which comes to these other folk — a Greater Glory than anything which men of little hearts and little minds conceive.

This, our tale, is a love story. But for the tired scribe whose pen scratches line after line across the paper, it is more than that. It is the Greater Glory as he has seen it descend upon a woman. It is the narrative of a girl's love for a man and the still greater love for the sons of that man which she bore him as has been set down before. But it does not end

with a wedding. Few of us, indeed, live "happily ever after." It ends with the coming of the Greater Glory as will be subsequently set forth. It goes beyond the commencement of courtship. It follows onward into some of the deep and sacred tragedies and dramas of plain, ordinary, day-to-day living. And the best part of it is this: This is the story of Everywoman, — your wife and my wife, your mother and my mother — a dedication, a eulogy, a testament.

Mary Wood married Jack Purse on the evening of the day of the auction. She married him in the little front parlor of the Methodist parsonage on School Street before the Reverend David Dodd, who is now sainted old "Doctor" Dodd of the Calvary Methodist Church. The only witnesses were Mrs. Dodd, who blew her nose, shed tears and smiled simultaneously all through the ceremony, which after all was so short and simple as to seem as though something were horribly illegal somewhere at starting immediately to live together afterward.

If, on the evening of her wedding day, Mary gave a thought to the dreams she had dreamed, of the gorgeous wedding which she had imagined was coming on some wonder night in the future, of wealth and aspiration and golden opportunity which married life was to open to her, no one knew it but herself. If there was the least twinge of bittersweet disappointment that this simple little exchange of promises before the kindly minister was her "great wonder night", it never disturbed the outer surface of the love for the young chap whom she raised her sweet face up toward when the thing was done and called him husband. Despite her mother's experience, her

mother's bitterness, the girlhood of warning, she had married finally for love, on eighteen dollars a week, and before her lay the same variety of matrimony which year in and year out has dotted the continent with millions and millions of homes and makes up, forsooth, the Great America. But very worthwhile homes they are, though built on a very great amount of affection, the courage of ignorance, and a pitifully meager amount of money.

The boy and girl came out and stood on the sidewalk.

"Mr. Hod says we are to come up to his house and spend our first night together," Jack said huskily.

At the top of Maple Street Hill, before Sam's house, she paused. For a moment she clasped his arm, her face against his shoulder.

"Oh, Jack," she said softly, "I guess — I guess — I'm yours now; yours to love, work with, play with, suffer with, sorrow with — yours to abuse, neglect, forsake. My life is yours now, Jack. Like the verse in the Bible: Where you live I will live. What you suffer, I will suffer. Your joys shall be my joys; your successes my successes. I don't mind what the future brings only this: Be good to me Jack, — take me and do what you will with me. But be as kind as you can, Jack, that some day I may be able to show mother she was wrong!"

And man and wife, they passed in to Sam Hod's house for their first supper together.

At the moment that Jack Purse and Mary Wood entered Sam Hod's house together, another girl came out of the Henderson house and strolled leisurely down Main Street.

Near the corner of Union Street she heard the rattle

of buggy wheels behind her and the hoarse bark of an excited dog. She turned. Slug Truman, driving Monday-Washing with Cardinal Wolsey on the seat beside him, stopped at the curb beside her.

"Mibb — come here," he called thickly.

She switched her jacket to her other arm and strolled across the strip of sod to the buggy side.

"Well!" she demanded. "What ails you, Slug? You look like a case of seven-weeks' sickness."

"Anything on this evenin', Mibb?"

"Nothin' special."

"Get in and take a ride with me, Mibb."

"Where you goin'?"

"Get in and take a ride with me, and I'll tell you. It's awful important, Mibb."

She cast an uneasy look at his heavy features, but she calculated she could take care of herself with any man that she ever see wearin' pants and so she got in beside the boy and they rumbled away in the summer's evening.

"Mibb — Mary Wood has just married Jack Purse!"

"She's *what*?"

"Married Jack Purse — to-night! to-night! — in the Methodist parsonage. They're up to supper together at Hod's right now. They're man and — wife!"

"The — little — fool!" Mibb ejaculated. "But why the ding-ding are you takin' on about it, Slug?"

"I guess I'm — I'm — jealous, Mibb."

"Jealous of who — Purse?"

"Of just bein' married and have somebody to care about me."

"Gosh, but you're an awful fathead!"

"Don't talk to me like that, Mibb. It hurts!" He sloughed down into the seat. "Hell," he told her miserably, "you don't know what a happy home we got up there on Main Street, — dad sick, Esmeralda stage-struck and always bossin' Ma, and Ma with no more spine than a — than a — than a fish! I'm sick of it, Mibb — plumb sick. I wish it was different, Mibb — so different."

She looked at him out of the corner of her world-wise young eye.

"Just how sick *is* your dad, anyhow?"

"Pretty bad, Mibb. He may go off any day now. He's hit pretty hard."

"Slug," she said quietly, "let's run away and get married too!"

"Let's *what!*" he cried.

"Let's run away and get married. Mary Wood and Jack Purse aren't the only ones who can play the game."

"You'd — marry — me — a great big lummoX that's always puttin' his hoof in everything?"

"Yes," she declared determinedly, as though she had arrived at her decision long beforehand, "I'll marry you, Herb Truman."

"W-h-e-n?" he demanded blankly.

"Any old time you want me!"

The big, fat, rosy young man turned pale. Then the blood surged into his face again and made it beefy red.

"You mean it, Mibb?"

"You don't imagine I'm talkin' in my sleep do you, on a question of so much importance?"

"Oh — Mibb!"

"There's no need for you to get maudlin about it, as I see," she reminded him.

"But you called Mary a — a — little fool."

"Sure she's a little fool. Because Jack Purse isn't situated like you're situated."

Herb should have taken warning from that significant declaration, but he did not. The lad was heartsick, lonesome and miserable. It wasn't the girl he was in love with, it was love and comradeship and consolation in his life. He recovered from his lugubrious surprise and like the boy eternal that he was in his heart, he suddenly began to enthuse with the proposition the Henderson girl had suggested.

"The evening train is comin' down the valley," he cried. "Hear the whistle? Mibb! — let's — let's elope!"

"The sky's the limit!" she retorted brazenly. "Yes, let's!"

"The station! I wonder can we make it?"

"We could if I had those lines."

"Giddap, Monday-Washin'!" he cried suddenly. And he struck the little mare with the whip.

Down through the village they were carried swiftly and around the corner of Depot Street toward the station. Just once Herb wondered if he might not regret this thing she had proposed. But Mary Wood was lost to him now, — lost for always. He might as well take second choice while he had the chance. Besides, he didn't want to endure the coming week of readjustment alone. A wife of his own might help. And so he refused to harken to consequences.

And they made their train.

"We'll just see who gets the most out of marriage!" declared Mibb Henderson grimly and with abandon.

"What?" demanded Herb above the rumble of the vehicle.

"I'm not talkin' to you; I'm talkin' to myself.

I was making a remark about something Mary Wood said once. It's nothing you need lose any sleep over, now!"

So, with a far different kind of feeling in her heart, another girl in the office of our little local paper went that night to her marriage.

And Slug Truman married Mabel Henderson, "the nine-o'clock-girl", instead of Mary Wood, and up in heaven an angel sighed a couple of times and then with a philosophical remark which no one in heaven above overheard, flew about its celestial business.

PART II



CHAPTER I

WE HAVE FOLLOWED OUR YOUNG FOLK THROUGH THE MORNING OF THEIR LIVES AND THE THROES OF YOUNG LOVE. WE COME NOW TO THE AFTERNOONS — AT PRESENT THE EARLY AFTERNOONS — AND THE HENDERSON GIRL COMES BACK FROM HER WEDDING TRIP.

FOR the proper and orderly dénouement of the events which have gone before, it has been necessary to refer now and then to the old files of our newspaper from the time we founded the *Telegraph* up to '83. But approaching now the events in the years 1883 to 1897, it is necessary to take the battered old volumes down from the safe, spread them freely over tables, chairs and reporters' desks, and watch the front pages and follow the local columns day by day. For from the ready-reference of those files we have refreshed in our memories many incidents that throw sidelights on the people of our story, help to straighten our chronology and bind in neatly to form a symmetrical, clean-cut whole, many of the tiny frayed ends and ravelings of our narrative.

For instance, here comes first a half-column account of the Purse-Wood nuptials. It says that they were "quietly married" at the Methodist parsonage on the preceding evening on account of "the recent death of the bride's mother." There is a brief sketch of each person's life in which the phrases "accepted a

position" when the meaning is that they "got a job", and "in order to advance their prospects" when the inference is that it was the only thing left for them to do under the circumstances, occur frequently in the text. Thus do these calloused, heartless, obstreperous country newspapermen prostitute their talents ignominiously to soften the tragedies of day-to-day living for plain people and help them to put the best face upon shame and necessity and misfortune in the eyes of the multitude.

Witness how the account reads on: That owing to recent untoward events bride and groom will "postpone their honeymoon until a later date" but that in honor of the nuptials a pretty wedding supper was served at the home of the young couple's employer attended by a "few intimate friends." And the menu is given — in all of which may be detected the hand of Mrs. Hod and the heart of her husband.

Turn over two issues and here on the fifth page, third column, fourth item down is something else:

Mr. and Mrs. John Purse, who were recently married at the Methodist parsonage, have furnished a home in the house owned by William Stevens on Pleasant Street and will entertain their many friends after November 1st.

What did it matter that the "furnishing of a home" was merely the fitting up of three rooms in one of Bill Stevens' upper tenements next to the wood yard on Pleasant Street, — that the "furnishings" were mostly indescribably sacred little odds and ends which the girl had saved from the auction or bid in with her slender purse or that Jack had bought on instalments from Blake Whipple's "Household Emporium & Furniture Bazaar"? The hands of a

woman with a song in her heart have been accomplishing miracles in making a human habitation out of nothing since the days when the cave man returned at nightfall and found a curtain of skins hung before his door in the first faint privacies of the race.

Mary's hands were busy and her heart was singing. When November first brought the curious friends, not one of them conceived in his most irrational moment that the hideously ugly box house with its flat tin roof and awful jig-saw trimmings could have sheltered the homely comfort which they found. It was a sad day when Bill sold his three tenements as a site for a business block and one by one Mary had to take down the pictures and knickknacks and fold up the carpets. On all the long life journey from a furnished room to a mansion, there is never again a home just like the first.

Lest we be accused of morbidness, let us turn a few more pages of the files. What is this under a "two head" down in the lower left-hand corner of this front page?

The village was pleasantly surprised last evening when the six o'clock train up the valley brought back to Paris two young people very well known in the community, who during a week's absence have joined their lives and fortunes: Herbert R. Truman, son of our well-known manufacturer Silas Truman, and Miss Mabel Henderson, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Harvey Henderson of East Main Street, who is being introduced about town to-day as Mrs. Herbert Truman.

The couple had been entirely successful in keeping their courtship secret and last Friday night they

slipped away quietly down to Brattleboro and were married. They have since been spending a week's honeymoon in Boston and Providence.

Mr. Truman is in business with his father in the manufacture of the celebrated Short-Cramp Farm Wagon and Mrs. Truman for the past four years has been employed as compositor in the *Telegraph* office. It is a queer coincidence that all unwittingly the couple were married at about the same hour as two other employes of the local newspaper plant, Mr. and Mrs. John Purse. Cupid appears to have acquired an extraordinary fancy for the office where the *Telegraph* is published.

For the present Mr. and Mrs. Truman have taken a suite at the Whitney House. It is rumored that the bridegroom is negotiating for the purchase of the Holland property on Maple Street which he will have rebuilt and furnished for a home. The best wishes of their many friends go with them for a long and happily married life.

"Huh!" exclaimed that lovable old philosopher, Uncle Joe Fodder, as he sat in our office whence he came to read the down-state exchanges, "—happily married life! It's got to go that way in print, I suppose. But when one party marries on heartache and t'other marries on a flyin' grab for purple and fine linen, there's goin' to be just about as much happiness as between Cain and the girl from Nod when she found out his record and called on the four winds o' heaven to witness that she was a buncoed woman. When Mibb finds out Herb's always loved some one else and when Herb finds out that most of his wad is findin' its way into the hands o' his wife's mother, believe me there's goin' to be doin's. It'll be a case of

a snippy, fussy little female poodle mated up to a brokenhearted mastiff."

"Maybe there's something to it," Sam admitted.

"You're gol-durned right there's somethin' to it," vouched Uncle Joe. "Give 'em two months and watch the ruckus. Solomon, father of all Masons because he had so many wives, had an easier time with his domestic circle than Herb's goin' to have with just two."

"Two?"

"Mibb — and Mrs. Harvey Henderson."

"But will Herb's folks stand for anything from Mrs. Harvey Henderson?"

"No. That's why there's goin' to be fireworks for Herb. He ain't married Mibb alone, — which would be bad enough. He's went and spliced up with her family."

Mary had not given up her job following her marriage. She and Jack needed her wages worse than ever. So she was in the back room alone, starting in early that noon because we were short-handed, when Mibb came in.

Neither the Queen of Sheba nor Dolly Varden had anything on Mibb on her return from her wedding journey. She wore an elaborate creation of broadcloth and satin, mauve and mustard. The skirt was flounced and draped and multiple-pleated after the fashion of the period, the bustle and the basque waist set off a figure which Skinny Napoleon declared was a cross between the Venus de Milo and a two-day drunk, and on her head she wore one of those ridiculously small hats seen now only in the wood cuts of old ante-bellum magazines.

"Hello, little Eight-Point!" she called out. "How's the local column?"

Mary rested her stick on the edge of her case and stared at the butterfly that had emerged from its black cambric chrysalis.

"Well," demanded Mibb, "and how do you like the landscape gardening?"

"You're — beautiful!" exclaimed Mary, her hungry eyes taking in every detail of the citified attire.

"I'm graduated — thank Gawd!" returned Mibb, with a suggestive sniff at the lay-out of cases. "I thought I'd drop in because I heard you and Jack had also married. I didn't know," insinuated Mibb with a poke of the parasol that matched the suit at an old patent-medicine cut lying on the floor, "— that Jack could afford it. But you're going to keep on working, of course. That explains it."

Mary picked up her stick hurriedly. She read it over with eyes which saw no type.

"Yes," she said after a time, "I'm going to keep on working."

Mibb paced grandly up and down the short type alley, swinging the parasol, affecting to be interested in the type cases as though she had never seen them before and wondered how such little slivers of metal were managed.

"Of course I wouldn't say anything for the world about another woman's husband; but — weren't you a bit hasty, Mary? You ought to have waited until you could afford it, you know."

"I wasn't — any more hasty — than you were, Mibb." Mary examined very minutely the badly-penned copy before her on the cap-case.

"What do you mean? Why, Herbert and I have been going together for years — long before you ever arrived in Paris! And we'd been planning our elopement for weeks and weeks. It was — grand!"

Mary remained silent. The type began to click in her stick.

"We've decided to buy the Holland house. I think I shall have it made over, retaining its colonial style." She continued to stroll restlessly about, examining things very superficially and condescendingly.

"I hope you will be very happy," said Mary. She did not know what else to say.

"Happy? Huh! Leave it to me, Mary Wood. I always told you, didn't I, there was nothing like money to make a marriage happy. Herb says to me this morning, he says: 'I want you should have everything your heart desires, Mabel; you only got one life to live and while it's short it ought to be merry. Don't let money stand in your way of making life worth living. Anything you see that you want, say the word and I'll try to see that you get it.' That's the kind of husband to have, Mary Wood."

"Yes," said Mary, "that's the kind of husband to have."

Mibb was nettled. Somehow, beyond her first show of surprise, Mary didn't seem at all impressed by her "creation" or the costly little dewdrop bonnet. Mary's last statement she fancied contained a subtle inference of doubt at her veracity. It piqued Mibb to declare:

"Only a fool would marry a man who didn't have nothing to fall back on but his wages."

It had the desired effect. Mary paused for a moment, stared ahead of her absently, turning a capital M over and over in her grimy fingers.

"I think," she said softly, "that is rather an unkind statement to make."

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of Jack particularly, al-

though that doesn't exempt him. I was looking at it in the light of my own case," returned Mibb grandly. One of her paniers caught on an unsunken lag-screw head which held a type rack together. She unfastened herself and got a smutch on her puffs. "My!—what a dirty hole!" she cried fastidiously.

"I see you and Herbert are staying at the Whitney House," suggested Mary, trying to turn the conversation off dangerous ground. "I'm surprised you didn't return to Herbert's folks until your new home is ready."

"Herb's mother gets on my nerves," snapped the other. "To shake hands with her is like wringing the claw of a corpse."

"And how does your mother like Herbert?"

"She knows a good thing when she sees it," announced Mibb. Mary glanced up in surprise at the tone and manner. But the Henderson girl was reading some inconsequential thing tacked up on the wall. Mibb went on: "You folks are boarding, I suppose. Naturally it's the only thing you could do in your straitened circumstances."

"We are furnishing a little place on Pleasant Street," returned Mary as evenly as she could, adding: "You must come over and see me when we pronounce it finished."

"I might drop in for a moment." She did not return the invitation.

The boys and girls came to work presently and crowded around Mabel and congratulated her, and the other two women admired her finery and gazed at her lost in envy and admiration. Mibb was satisfied now. She came over to Mary's stool before she left and used Mary's little three-corner piece

of mirror on the window casing to tie the bow of her bonnet very precisely.

"Well," she said, "good-by. I'm sorry for you, having to stay indoors this beautiful autumn day. I've got to go try on a dress at Mrs. Seaver's and then I think I shall take a drive with the little black mare over to the dance at Warfields this evening."

"Good-by," said Mary.

The Henderson girl swept out like the grand lady she was, — from the standpoint of clothes. It was the undignified parade of the snobbery of a cheap, ill-bred woman. But to Mary it hurt. When Mibb had gone, she sat looking out the side window for several minutes. The fragrant autumn air, in sharp contrast to the pungent odor of printing ink inside the shop, wafted in on the pleasant afternoon sunshine and called to her. She would like to be out in the beauty this golden afternoon. She would like to be going over to Mrs. Seaver's to have a fine dress fitted. She would enjoy taking Monday-Washing all alone by herself and driving over the yellow and scarlet hills to Warfields.

But she put the tempter righteously out of her thoughts.

"Some day — I will!" she told herself. "My time hasn't come — yet!"

She came face to face with Herbert that evening as she emerged from the Red Front grocery with her arms laden with bundles. There was a confused, averted-faced greeting. Then to her dismay — and bit of panic — Herb fell into step beside her and walked to the corner of Pleasant and Pine streets.

After three or four blocks of silence, she said:

"Well, Herbert — how did it happen?"

He read her thoughts perfectly, and her meaning.

"I met Sam Hod in Fred Barrett's jewelry store, that afternoon," confessed the boy. "He was telling Fred about Jack — buying you some kind of wedding present. He said you and Jack were to be married that night and his wife was already fixing up the wedding supper."

"Well?"

"I didn't know what else to do — I was so lonely and disappointed and miserable. I went and got Monday-Washing and hitched her up and went driving all by myself. Suddenly out beyond the Greene River bridge it all come to me like a vision out o' the dyin' afternoon's twilight. You was bein' married — *for life!* After to-night there was no gettin' you; it wouldn't even be proper to see you alone after this, not even for a talk. And just in that minute I wanted a woman to talk to and give me some — some — some sympathy worse than I'd ever wanted one in my life. Sounds soft and sickenin', don't it? But I just did. And the hopelessness of it all, and what a mess I'd made o' things and the panic that maybe I was too big and fat and homely — too much of a slob — for any woman ever to want me exceptin' the wrong kind, got to my head, and drivin' down the next street I see Mibb."

"Yes, Herbert."

"I'm tellin' you as a brother. I see her and went sort o' crazy, I guess. All I knew, we was rattling down the street to the station and the down train was waitin' with steam up. 'Oh, what a lark,' says she after a time. I give Jim Barnes, the station agent, two dollars to take Monday-Washing back home and stable her and tie up Card, and Mibb and I got on the last car without even buyin' a ticket."

The boy moved his head. The gaslamp from the corner shone on his features. He was weeping silently, without sobs, as men weep. Never had Mary wanted to comfort him as a sister might comfort a brother, as she did in that moment. She knew the influence she exercised over him to make him confess his troubles. She knew that to confess his troubles might make him feel better. Very sympathetically she said :

“Yes, Herbert. I understand. And then what?”

“All the way down Mibb was keyed up and kept sayin’ over and over again what a lark it was and what a sensation they’d be at home when the news come back. She let me caress her a bit, that was some satisfaction. Only I wanted more’n that. I felt as if I wanted to have the kind o’ mother you read about in story books come along and pick me up and rock me to sleep. I wanted a lullaby to make me forget I’d lost you, Mary.”

“And you were married?”

“Yes, we was married. And we went on down to Boston and Mibb splurged.”

This last seemed sufficient in itself as an explanation of what Mibb alone had the courage to put into words :

“And you’re not happy with her, are you, Herbert?”

“I could be happy — if she’d let me. I could take a grip on myself and call it a sportin’ proposition and that I was married and would make the best of it — and the most. In time I could love her a lot. But — she ain’t domestic. That’s a good word, ain’t it?”

“Yes, Herbert,” said Mary sadly. “That’s a very good word.”

"Oh what a mess I've made o' things!"

"Perhaps not, Herbert. You do your part nobly. Keep right on doing your part. Be a — a — good sport, as you say. Time works many changes. We never know what a day will bring forth."

"It's the money!" declared the boy. "If I hadn't it I'd be working like Jack — for wages — and married to some girl who cared about me for myself and not because it give her a 'lark' or allowed her to splurge. Gawd, how I wish I was poor! It's just simply hell!"

"Let's see how it will work out, Herbert. Please do!"

Ten minutes afterward, she watched him disappear through the falling leaves, with a heart full of sadness, — and happiness. There was sadness there for Herbert; there was happiness there that she had deliberately put out of her mind that afternoon the thoughts which had tried to force their way in after Mibb had left her.

CHAPTER II

SO NOW WE GET DOWN TO THE BUSINESS OF LIVING AND ENTER A ROOM WHERE FOOTFALLS ARE HUSHED TO WITNESS THE ALMIGHTY SENDING A MIRACLE.

BACK to the Files again. Under date of December the 10th. What is this that we find?

A pleasant social time was held last evening on Pleasant Street when about fifteen friends and neighbors gathered to give a house-warming to Mr. and Mrs. John Purse. The evening was spent with games and music, and refreshments were served. The guests presented the young couple with a valuable parlor clock and the members of the office force as a body contributed toward a bronze horseman to surmount its top.

Still further on, under date of February the twenty-fifth and prominently displayed on the front page where it occupied two columns, an obituary which opened thus :

The community suffered a great shock last evening when Silas M. Truman, one of the town's most prominent business men and leading citizens, passed away in his magnificent Main Street home of a complication of diseases. He took to his bed over a fortnight ago, leaving his affairs in the hands of his son. He grew rapidly worse and the end came at twenty minutes to seven last night. He was 67 years old.

Follows an elaborate obituary. The grim comment about the town next day revealed the universal sentiment that Sam Hod had overdone it a bit. There are few real tears at the death of a highly successful plate-passer and mortgage forecloser.

But greater even than the death of Herbert's father and his son's inheritance of the house, the wagon works and the family money — at least to the importance of the dénouement of this narrative — is one little four-line item found in an August issue after several months of newspaper silence regarding the *Telegraph* folk.

The Purse tenement had been a cozy little place that first winter. Jack and Mary had both joined the Calvary Methodist Church and being a willing, accommodating little body, the girl was in demand at all sorts of social functions where there were rooms to be trimmed or children to be drilled or dishes to be washed, — which was not without its compensation in the matter of a permanent place in the village social circles and among the younger married people. There were many little "affairs" in the upper Purse tenement, many surprise parties, many attendances on singing schools where the girl's clear soprano and Jack's fine tenor increased their popularity.

But toward the end of the spring, Mary left us. One April morning she failed to report for work. Jack carried home her black kimono apron, the extra pair of emergency rubbers and umbrella that had stood for so long at her case and the corner of the wall.

She gradually dropped out of church society; she attended but one lawn party. Jack went around with a worried look and sought every opportunity

of running up over-time for a reason other than the creditor's moral claims upon his slender pay envelope.

July fourth came with its unholy racket in the gray of the morning and its parade at ten o'clock, ending with fireworks in the evening which Mary watched from the little front porch over the front steps. Lazy August was upon us. And one day the small Ashley boy, who lived downstairs under the Purses, padded into the back room in his bare feet, the pucker-strings of his blouse hanging down and his nose very damp. He found Jack making up the last galleys into the front page.

"Hey, Mister Purse," he announced excitedly so that all the office heard, "—you better getcher hat and go home quick. Somebody's brought you a baby!"

Jack went home with a strange feeling in his heart. He hardly had the strength to climb the outside back stairs. He went in through the kitchen. Mrs. Ashley was there, and Mrs. Pother-ton from the next house and — Doctor Johnson.

"Your wife, son," announced Johnson, rolling down his sleeves as he stepped into the homely little sitting room from the bedchamber on the east. "—has just given birth to a whale of a baby son!" He stepped before the bewildered young husband. "You can't go in there," the doctor declared, "not until you come across with cigars! Good ones! Two bits apiece!"

Nevertheless, Jack went in.

A great American author has since declared that there are three earthly experiences without which no

life is complete: Love, War, Poverty. There is a fourth. It is the birth of a child:

Of all events in the annals of humankind this is the greatest — life's essence and foundation.

Noble sacrifice, fearless courage, indescribable agony, the triumph of the love beside which all other loves are weak and whimsical fantasies — one little knows what deep and sacred depths can be plumbed in the fathoms of human character until he has beheld this greatest of all miracles, until he has witnessed the going-down of a woman into and beyond the Valley of the Shadow of Happiness to find the Singing Souls of the unborn children, entice a little soul away by the tenderness of her eyes and the compassion of her arms — and bear it up the steps and out into the world of earthly sunlight through the pink and golden portals of birth.

A man marries a woman. The ceremony lies in the past. There comes the return from the honeymoon. The event is but a few paragraphs on an out-of-date newspaper page and to all but their relatives and a few intimate friends the new home stirs not a ripple in the social sea of great humanity. And then — a baby comes!

A baby comes!

In some side room where curtains are drawn, footfalls softened and sounds are hushed, a diminutive gasping human creature convulses spasmodically on a nurse's arm. The first breaths of earthly air are burning like fire in its tiny lungs. Its black face is slowly turning pink. Its features are becoming understandable. Its fists are opening and closing, its vocal chords are strengthening, its breathing regular. Its head is misshapen, its eyes twisted, its

legs crooked ; its general anatomical design sends a panic through the household, — through all but a relieved physician, a smiling nurse, a mother who dimly knows that all is well.

This is a new human life begun. This is the commencement of a soul.

Gases may swirl out in the seething immensities of space, cool, form a planet, — and to-morrow that planet be rolling cold and dead in the infinite zeros of ether. Continents may be discovered and civilizations established, — but the cycles of eternal time speed onward and seas blot out the one and evolution ride down the other. Empires may rise and states may flourish, — but peoples rise against peoples, they go down in the dust, to-morrow the sands of the eternal deserts lie heavily upon them. Cities may become great, ships may plow the oceans, markets may teem with trade and statesmen rise to glory ; fortunes may be made or lost and men may lose their souls for ambition or the love of woman. But what indeed of all these things unless ever down the ages comes the inexhaustible Niagara of new babies ? How pale and insignificant do all these things which men term great sink down beside the onward march of hordes of children, watching as they come for mothers' faces.

A baby comes, indeed !

There will be days of play and nights of fever ahead, months of helplessness, a few brief years of banging on the table with a spoon and ruling a household's heart. There will be the time of awkwardness, — saucer eyes, big knees, bursting buttons and rending seams. There will be times of calf-love and seasons of heartburn. There will be years of conceit unbearable ; periods, too, of cruel

chastisement. Then it will know real love and the beginning of the Golgotha of seeing visions and dreaming dreams. Sorrow and tragedy and disappointment will be its portion. And then, far, far ahead — somewhere down the dim corridors of saner, cooler, finer years — may come to a brief decade of real usefulness, to itself and to the race.

And as poet has sung and author has written from the days when Pandora's box was opened and all the troubles of the world were loosened — so long that only the fool would claim the thought for his own — some one must be tender, faithful, hopeful, ever-patient, never discouraged, always confident through all those years and times, — the Some One who lies upon the bed — as John Purse looked that day on the wife of his love lying upon the bed — her body wet with agony, her eyes hollow, her cheeks haggard, her smile a mask to hide the pain, — the Some One who reaches for the little reddened creature, lays it upon her heart and soothes its hunger with her breast.

This is the grandeur and infinity of God focused in the instincts of a woman. This is our genesis and our decalog. This is our Vision of the Most High, life's fourth experience — which should come first!

It was evening. Jack was alone in the room with his wife and the newly arrived baby. The two women had gone home. Doctor Johnson had departed, promising to get a nurse over before midnight. The little son lay sleeping on his mother's arm, lost in flannel.

"Jack!"

"Yes, dear."

"I hope he'll be a great good man, — a minister!"

"A man! You're figuring pretty far ahead, Mary. Let's raise him to be a boy first. I'll be thankful when he can talk!"

The man walked to the window. Thrusting his hands in his pockets he said:

"I wonder why it is that every woman wants her boy to be a preacher?"

He stood looking out into the summer night and the street lamps beginning to sprinkle the dusk. And after a time she replied:

"I guess it must be because preachers are supposed to represent all that's finest and best in manhood." But in her heart she knew it was more than that. Perhaps one other Mary could have framed the idea in words twenty centuries ago.

"I'll be thankful if he grows up to be anything, — so long as it isn't a newspaperman!"

Sam came over around eight o'clock, bringing the paper. When he had seen the new baby, spoken gently to the inert woman, and gone, Jack came into the bedroom with the newspaper in one hand and a dimmed light in the other. He gave Mary the night's *Telegraph* properly folded to the designated place. Then he held the lamp, turning it up momentarily to give her the illumination to read:

LAST MINUTE NEWS!

Born — To Mr. and Mrs. John Purse of Pleasant Street, this afternoon, a son, weight eight and three-quarter pounds. Congratulations!

CHAPTER III

MIBB TRUMAN PAYS MARY A VISIT IN HER TENEMENT HOME — THE FIRST OF THREE VISITS THAT SHE EVER PAYS IN HER "CAREER", AT WHICH "A PLEASANT TIME IS NOT HAD BY ALL."

EVEN the most realistic story of married life drags after a time if the attempt is made to chronicle the thousand and one situations and struggles and sacrifices and anticipations and heart-hopes of the days and the months and the years. And as the greatest part of Mary Purse's story is the last part, we can turn the pages of the files here in great handfuls down through the Eighties — after a passing reference to one or two situations that stand out in high light after the new baby came.

We didn't see much of Mary after the first youngster arrived. Now and then one of us in the office would meet her pushing a rather noisy baby carriage with wooden wheels and steel tires along the village streets of a pleasant afternoon, perhaps idling along the Main Street windows and pausing to gaze wistfully into them, working the carriage forward and backward to keep Thomas Joshua Purse from riling up the entire business section. We took note of the very plain clothes and how the sleeves of her jacket were always just out of fashion. Her hat would be pinned too far back on her head. Her rubbers would be sewed neatly enough with a black thread where the shoes had broken through.

But her face, despite the fine lines of care and labor that were beginning to come and which were indeed changing her from a girl into a woman, was still pretty. And when any one, even strangers, stopped, as fussy old ladies sometimes will, or toothless gentlemen carrying canes, to comment on the size and health of the lusty youngster in the carriage, there was a pathetic pride which seemed to defy the town and the world.

Then one day Mibb stood on the front porch when Mary went down to answer the bell. She was overfed, over-dressed, over-masseured.

"Well," said she, the condescension in her voice not to be mistaken, "I've come to see your baby!"

Mary was dressed in a cheap wrapper, her breast was decorated with safety pins, the apron gathered in a quick roll at her waist. It was blotched where Thomas Joshua Purse had five minutes before upset a dish of syrup upon her and she had no other to wear until morning. She remembered that the parlor curtains were in the wash and the front room looked barren as a small barn without them; that the sitting room was strewn with toys, carelessly wrecked trains of cast-iron cars and picture blocks which were ideal when one had an ankle he wished to turn and make useless for a week. Half her week's dry-wash was strewn about the same room where she had been sprinkling when the bell rang. Yet she could not refuse Mibb entrance. Biting her lip, Mary tried to smile and invited the other upstairs.

"I suppose I ought to have called on you before," declared Mibb, "but I've been so busy getting the Holland house properly furnished, with Mama having so many contrary ideas which she simply must have carried out, and there's been so much to see to

since Herbert's father passed away" — (and Mibb sighed wonderfully well) — "that I haven't had the chance to think about anybody. My! — what a little house! And do you live in these three rooms?"

"Yes," replied Mary quietly, "we live here, the three of us — a room apiece!" she laughed — "and find ourselves quite comfortable."

"Well, I declare. I couldn't stand it. I must have space. Only yesterday I was telling Herbert that we must tear out the wall on the north room of the library before the contractors called the rebuilding finished and make that room larger. I can't bear to be cramped. Large rooms and plenty of them is my motto. And what's this?"

"This," replied Mary, wheeling the carriage with the coarse wooden wheels over, "is Tommy Joshua Purse, age eight months and fifteen days."

"My stars! What's the matter with him?"

With a startled turn Mary bent over the carriage. She inventoried the contents with puzzled anxiety.

"Why, nothing," she declared.

"But he's so small and so red. Goodness gracious! He looks like a worm!"

"He will recover, I dare say, by the time he dons long trousers."

"Mercy! I hope so. It would be awful to have a son in long trousers looking like a worm. To what college are you planning to send him?"

Mibb detected irony and subtle sarcasm in Mary's reply. Her question was a sally in kind. But there was nothing but deadly seriousness in the mother's reply as she said: "We were thinking of Dartmouth; my own father graduated from there, you know."

"No; I didn't know your father was a college

man," said Mibb blankly. "I always thought of Silent Wheeler as your father. It's queer your mother chose to marry him after first marrying a Dartmouth man."

"She was left with a little child, without insurance, and knowing no business with which to support herself. All she could do was keep house. There was no alternative. She accepted Mr. Wheeler, thinking to give me a home. Poor mother. I wish — she could see my baby!"

This last was somehow the sudden wistful heart-cry of a little girl.

Mibb was uncomfortable. She leaned over the carriage and poked Thomas Joshua a couple of times with a stiff forefinger, — as old ladies sometimes poke at prospective pot-roasts at the butcher's.

"Please — don't!" cried Mary hurriedly. "You'll awake him and I've just rocked him to sleep." But Thomas Joshua stirred and stretched and opened his eyes and his mouth, and great and terrible was his sudden lamentation. Mary lifted him in her arms.

"He must be an awful aggravation at times — bawling like that."

Mary smiled sadly. She laid her lips for a moment on the downy little head where an artery was throbbing.

"Aggravation? Poor Mabel, what a lonesome unhappy time you must be having!"

"Lonesome! Unhappy! Just because I haven't got a — a — a — worm?" Mibb laughed. "I should say not. Every woman has got a right to happiness — in her own way."

"Yes," agreed Mary, "every woman has a right to happiness in her own way." She looked at the other

in her exquisite black silk with the cut-steel buttons and the paniers and the puffs and the overskirts and the rare ruching at the throat and the gaudy jewelry on her characterless fingers. "Some day, Mibb," she said, "you will be sorry."

"Sorry for what?"

"Sorry for what you told Herbert on this same subject last Sunday afternoon."

"What do you know about that?"

"Herbert came over here Sunday evening — to see Jack and I and Thomas Joshua. He and Thomas Joshua romped on the carpet for a half hour. After we'd got Joshua away to bed and we sat talking about the future, Herb broke down and cried like a motherless little boy and — told me — us! — all about it."

"This," said Mibb, arising coldly, "is as enlightening as it is disgusting. Herb — going around — peddling tales of our privacies — to the neighbors —!"

"The fault is yours, Mabel. You shouldn't give him cause."

"He had probably been drinking."

"Yes, a little bit. It made me feel very badly. I've been thinking about it all the week."

"Indeed! How many men do you require — to feel badly for? I should think the mess you've made marrying a wage-slave like Jack Purse who can't provide you with a home bigger than a doll house and the whole proposition saddled with debt — would be quite sufficient."

"Herbert and I were quite good friends for a long time before he married you, Mabel."

"But not good friends enough so that he asked you to be his wife."

"I never wanted — to be his wife." She said it slowly, wondering if she were telling a falsehood.

"Because you never stood a chance. You know the story about the fox and the grapes."

In the voice of a lady, Mary replied :

"Herbert has been like a brother. In fact, I remember very distinctly the time and situation when he asked if he might consider me as a sister."

"All of which is as amusing as it is illuminating." The Henderson girl affected a fine superiority. Then her mood changed. With a deadly expression of cheap-charactered bad temper, she snapped : "But if he thinks he's got license to peddle our domestic differences all over Paris just because I'm too wise to tie myself down to a brace of night-squalling sour-smelling brats, he's going to find he's started something he'll have a warm time to finish." She gathered up her finery and made ready to depart. "I wouldn't have a young one for a million dollars!"

"And I wish I could have a dozen and I'd pay a million dollars for each one."

"You always were a mopey, sentimental little fool. I'm sure you're welcome to your worms!"

"You don't know, Mibb —"

"Yes, I do know. That's where I'm wise." She made a significant gesture at Mary Purse. "Look what they do to you. They keep you poor. They twist you out of shape with pain and work. They take the girlhood out of your face and your eyes, they tie you at home, they break your heart —"

Mary's eyes fused tears.

"Perhaps, Mibb, it's just as well after all that you have none. They keep you poor — financially — maybe. They twist you out of shape with pain and work, perhaps. They take away your girlhood and

keep you at home — I admit it. But as for breaking your heart — you don't know what it is to have a heart until — until —”

“This is banal and disgusting.”

“Some day, Mibb, I think you will be very, very sorry.”

“I'm willing to take my chances. I'd like a photograph of you and me stood up side by side thirty years from to-day. It might tell an interesting story.”

“Yes,” agreed Mary, “it might.”

“I came up here in all good friendship to see your baby. I have to listen to a sermon about that moth-eaten theory that woman's place is in the home sacrificing herself for race propagation. I won't bother you again. We think differently. You're old-fashioned. Your fireside-and-family notions are going out of date. There's a new day dawning for women and I'm not staying in my house and pulling down my curtains and refusing to see the sunrise. A woman has the right to happiness; she has the privilege of living her own life in her own way as much as a man. I intend to have my day of happiness — after what I've come up from and what I've endured. I intend to dictate what my life shall be in my own way. Tell Herbert that, the next time he comes around here to see his *sister* —”

“After what you've come up from, and what you've endured! O Mabel!” Mary sighed. “Some day you may realize that there's such a thing as happiness that comes from not dictating what our lives shall be, but in putting the best side out and making the most of things in any and all situations in which we find ourselves. I'm not at all con-

vinced that people who dictate their own lives in their own way are happiest. That way lies selfishness. It seems to me that in the case of a woman, struggling out of poverty, being twisted out of shape with pain and work, losing her girlhood, being tied at home because of babies — in short, the sacrifice of herself for others and especially little children, all comes under the head of the highest sort of service one can render the world and the fellow-folk in it. How about it, Mabel? And if there's a 'new day dawning' as you seem to think, it's the day when service is going to be glorified, and generosity and gentleness and self-sacrifice for others considered the things in life really worth while. I'm not at all impressed, Mibb, that you've read or are reading correctly the signs of the times."

"More sermonizing!" snapped Mibb. "Good-by, Mary Purse! Both of us may have had a common girlhood and worked side by side at a type case. But beyond that, we have nothing in common and as for me I am perfectly willing right here that our friendship should end."

With a sad face Mary laid Thomas Joshua in his carriage and started to show Mibb the way downstairs.

"You really needn't trouble yourself." Mabel Truman turned at the door. "I'll meet you thirty years from to-day, Mary Wood, and compare results!"

Mary did not return at once to the sprinkling of her clothes. After the rich woman had gone and the little sitting room was quiet, she lifted Thomas Joshua in her arms and sat for a long time by the window in the cracking rocker, looking down through the breeze-wafted muslin curtains on to Mrs.

Ashley's side flower beds. Thomas Joshua went to sleep. Half an hour afterward, when it was entirely unnecessary, she started humming a lullaby.

When Jack came home, Mary said :

"Mibb Truman was here this afternoon. She came to see Thomas Joshua."

"What did she think of him?" asked Jack.

"She called him a worm!"

"So long as Thomas Joshua doesn't turn out a bookworm or a newspaper-office grub, I'm satisfied," the husband declared. He was glum because things had not gone right in the back room that afternoon and he was worrying about the bills.

"I've told you," commented Mary quietly, after transferring a sizzling griddle of fried something from the stove to the table, "— that our Thomas Joshua is going to be a preacher."

"Don't set your heart on it too strongly. Preachers get paid even worse than newspapermen."

They were eating supper across a corner of the homemade kitchen table, Thomas Joshua — a future pastor — dining off the paint on a huge Noah's Ark, the gift of "Uncle Herbert", when the doorbell rang. Jack went down to the front door. In a moment he had returned and his face was serious.

"It was Judge Farmer's little boy. He says his father wants to see you and me at his office to-night at eight o'clock."

"Me!" Mary's face paled.

"On some kind of business."

Again the fright of "law" and "business" stabbed into the young mother's heart.

"What can Judge Farmer possibly want of you and — me?"

"I don't know. Judge Farmer's little boy didn't know."

"I can't go. There's no one to look after Thomas Joshua!"

"Maybe Mrs. Ashley will come up for an hour."

CHAPTER IV

IN WHICH A LONG LANE TURNS JUST A LITTLE BIT
AND THEN RESUMES ITS COURSE AGAIN AWAY TO
THE HORIZON.

OVER thirty years have passed since that evening. To-day Judge Farmer is a tall, grim, big-boned Vermonter with a Mark-Twain head of hair, a hawk-like nose containing a mole famous in three States, and a pair of enormous gray moustaches which fall below his chin like the tusks on a walrus. He is a dean of the Paris County Bar, president of the People's National Bank and director in half a dozen big corporations. But this night back in the Eighties he was a rising young attorney who was somewhat ceremonious with the consciousness of a recent judgeship and an increasing law practice among the "best people." His wavy black hair was scrupulously barbered and shining with bay rum, he wore a choice set of the black "side light" whiskers of the period and a tight-fitting suit of black broadcloth reputed to cost more money than any other combination of male attire in Paris county.

Jack and Mary climbed the stairs to his office in the southwest corner of the old Hawkins block with misgivings amounting almost to panic. It meant something in those days to be "summoned" to a lawyer's office in the evening!

The young Judge was busy with his law books as the couple entered. He arose very dignifiedly

and motioned them into the side room dominated by a life-sized print of Daniel Webster. They went in and took seats on the extreme edge of chairs.

At length Amos Farmer came in, carrying an envelope of ominous length which he laid down on the green baize table. He adjusted a swivel chair for his long richly-clad legs and seated himself gravely, lighting a cigar with the nicety of a priest kindling a sacred altar fire.

"I hope," faltered Mary, "you haven't called us down on account of bad news."

"Yes and no," replied the Judge, clearing his throat. Which only made the young man and woman the more uneasy.

Jack wet his lips. Mary gripped the chair-arms. Farmer picked up the long envelope and emptied it of papers. He unfolded and smoothed them on his knee. They looked to Jack like business letters and letter-press replies.

The Judge loved effect in those days. No one cares less for it at present.

"Mrs. Purse," he demanded, "where were you born?"

"In Foxboro Center — in Sixty-one."

"And your parents?"

"My father was Frederick Wood. My mother's name before her marriage was Sarah Talmadge."

"Ah, yes. Precisely. Good. Very good."

The Judge stroked his silky black whiskers. He continued:

"I wish to corroborate certain, ah, details in your genealogy. Can you tell me anything of your father's forebears?"

"He was the son of Hebion Wood who settled in

Bryant township in Eighteen-thirty. His grandfather was Micah Wood who fought in the Battle of Bennington —"

"That is going back far enough. Now about your own grandfather's family; about Hebion Wood. Whom did he marry?"

"Grandma Wood's name before she met Grandpa was Talmadge. I think her first name was Matilda."

"Yes. And Matilda Talmadge and Hebion Wood had how many children?"

"Four, Judge Farmer. One died while a baby and is buried beside Grandpa and Grandma in the family lot at the Center. There were two boys, my uncles, — Adam and Josiah. Adam went to Kansas just after the war and was killed by the Indians; Josiah went out to Indiana and later we heard he was in some kind of business in Chicago. He's living there now, I think. I never saw him. Mother was the youngest, born while Grandpa and Grandma lived for a time on the Holbrook place over to Merrittsville —"

"There were no children by your Uncle Adam? Are you positive?"

"We never heard of Uncle Adam being married."

"And Josiah?"

"Mother said none of the family heard from him much after he went West. There was some trouble between him and his father, I think."

"Ah, yes. Good. Very good. Excellent. Just as I wrote them."

"Wrote who?"

The Judge ignored the question. It was all part of his legal "ceremony." As judge of probate, he knew all of this but also as part of his love for effect, he had called upon the woman to go

through it to add to the mystery and import of the proceeding.

"I understand you had a half-brother who was amply taken care of by your stepfather's demise."

"Why, Judge, you know all about that. You handled it yourself. But I wouldn't call it he was 'amply' taken care of. You know the house didn't bring a buyer on account of its reputation — what Pa Wheeler did — and the bank took it for the mortgage. It hasn't been sold yet, has it?"

"No," Farmer answered. "But to get back to your half-brother and your immediate family: There were no other children but you and Arthur?"

"Why certainly not!"

"Then I take it that outside of any offspring which your Uncle Josiah might have left in the West, you are the only living representative of the Hebion Woods?"

"I guess I am, Mr. Farmer."

"Good. Very good. Ah, excellent."

"What has happened, Judge? What is all this about?"

"Two months ago," declared the Judge, "I received a letter from Pitts, Huling, Donovan and Wiley, — a firm of attorneys in Chicago. You asked me a moment ago if the news I had for you was bad. In one respect it is, although I presume the relationship is so far removed that it will not seriously grieve you. The fact is, Mrs. Purse, your Uncle Josiah of Chicago has passed away."

Mary sat searching the young lawyer's face with frightened eyes.

"He died some time since, at what date I am not informed. Two months ago, I say, I received a letter from the mentioned firm of attorneys request-

ing certain facts regarding the existence of any members of the Hebion Wood family or other near relatives. I replied consistently with the facts you have just confirmed."

"Yes," Mary whispered.

Jack sat with wide-opened eyes and lips apart.

"I might say that considerable correspondence followed. I did not inform you what was in progress for I did not wish to raise false hopes and bitter disappointment. Things have come to the point where your signature is required to certain affidavits and other documents and therefore —"

"My signature is necessary to documents? What do you mean?"

"In some aspects of the case I am as much in the dark as yourself. From present indications, however, I judge it safe to assert that you are about to inherit either money or property."

"I — am — about — to — inherit —"

"The amount of this money or the value of this property has not been disclosed to me. I have been retained by Pitts, Huling, Donovan and Wiley to look up the possible heirs of Josiah Wood here in Vermont. From certain things in the correspondence I do not think your mother's brother died worth a very great amount. But so far as I can judge, regardless of what it includes, you are the only beneficiary —"

"You mean somebody's died and left Jack and me *money*?"

"In popular parlance, I believe such to have been the case. Of course, it will take some little time yet to settle the man's estate completely and before anything tangible is forthcoming. Also there will probably be the settlement fees to come out of the

sum. I would advise against any too much optimism at present. But from now on I will keep you informed of the progress of the case and do all I can to facilitate the settlement."

The judge laid his cigar on the edge of the table, found the proper papers from among the sheaf, separated them and spread them out before him. He lifted the top of a big bronze ink-well and dipped in a pen.

"If you will sign these affidavits, Mrs. Purse, here on the lines I have indicated, we will not prolong your visit here any more than is necessary."

It was a quarter to nine when the girl and her husband reached the sidewalk. They turned the corner by the bank, went up Maple Street and toward Pleasant.

"Jack," whispered the girl fearfully, "it's — it's a dream! Jack, who would have thought that help would come to us from such a quarter. Jack! What's the matter? Aren't you glad?"

"For your sake, yes. For my sake — no!"

"Why not?"

"If it's a lot of money, I couldn't think of being a male 'Mabel-Henderson.' If it's only a little —"

"Isn't all that's yours mine too, Jack?"

"Certainly, dear."

"Then why isn't all that's mine — yours?"

"It's — different!" he choked.

CHAPTER V

THE INEVITABLE HAPPENS AS WE MAY HAVE SURMISED FROM THE START — AND OUR LITTLE TOWN OF PARIS KNOWS THE HENDERSON GIRL NO LONGER.

MIBB went to Herbert's office on River Street directly from the Purse house. Bud Matherson told her that Herb had gone home to harness Monday-Washing and drive over to Center Foxboro on business. Mibb went back to the Holland place and found her husband in the big ivy-covered barn, currying off the little black mare himself. He never allowed any other person but his wife to care for or drive the animal.

Somehow Herb had grown old. Only yesterday he had been but a fat, sportive, good-natured boy, — easy-going, affable, but with a certain pathos about his well-meant clumsiness. Since the unhappy ending to his love affair his marriage with spitfire, irresponsible Mabel, the constant friction between his mother and his mother-in-law, the death of his father, the unsuccessful accession to the place his father had filled so profitably in the town's business life and the untimely demise of one mammoth bulldog, by name Cardinal Wolsey, from eating food covered with rat poison — since his life had been shadowed by all these things, Herb had become a middle-aged man almost in a twelvemonth. The cowlick which for years had been a county joke was

not so obstreperous as formerly, at his temples a few gray hairs were showing. There were lines in his face and his eyes were always tired. Of late it was whispered around that "Herb ain't able to stand prosperity: he's takin' a quiet drink by himself occasionally."

But Mabel cared nothing for these things even if she noted them.

"I want to know," she demanded hotly, coming into the big airy varnished interior of the barn where Monday-Washing was hitched with tie ropes from either side her halter, "what on earth you mean by going over to the Purses' and making me ridiculous?"

Herb straightened up and looked at her with a puzzled frown. Mibb's eyes were blazing. He did not comprehend, but he sensed domestic breakers ahead. And the sea of matrimony had been in a more or less turbulent condition ever since he had pushed his bark from the shore. He turned back to his horse, scratched over a space of the glossy black coat and tapped out the currycomb on a doorpost.

"Answer me!" And Mibb stamped her foot.

"I don't know what you're talkin' about," he replied dully.

"What do you mean by going over there unbeknown to me—the Purses' of all places!—especially to that little sentimental chit of a Mary Purse—and mewling around about us not having a lot of brats!"

Herb curried for a moment in silence.

"Call 'em children," he suggested. "It sounds better!"

"I'll call 'em what I please."

"I ain't called upon for no explanations. Reckon

I can go where I want and say what I please. There warn't any prohibition o' that in the marriage license."

"Haven't you any sense of propriety? Haven't you any family pride?"

"Family pride? Sure! That's why I'd like a few little shavers round this stiff and stuck-up place — like Thomas Joshua of the Purses'."

"But if you and I don't think alike on that subject doesn't common decency and manhood demand that you keep quiet about it and not advertise our differences to the town?"

"Ain't advertised 'em to the town. Ain't said a word about you to the Purses' — Mary or anybody. Just been over there a few times and played with their kid. Where's the harm in that?"

"You must have said something about it or Mary Purse wouldn't have known."

"Mary Purse ain't nobody's female fool, I guess. That's more'n I can say o' some people."

"So you'd insult me!"

"I wish I had the cussedness in me to insult you. Wish I had it in me to be a damned wife-beater. Maybe we'd both be happier."

"If you ever laid a finger on me, you know what would happen. I'd—I'd leave you, Herb Truman—I'd leave you as sure as God made little apples!"

"I believe it," Herb rejoined. "That's why I say I wish I had it in me and then both of us'd be happier."

Mibb bit her lip. The blood ran. She grew a bit hysterical.

"Yes," she cried shrilly, "you talked like that to me the night we rode down to Brattleboro, didn't you? A pretty way to cheat a girl — marry her

and take away her liberty so she can't marry anybody else without a divorce or a scandal and then —"

"I can't see as you're the one that's cheated. What about me?"

"You! You! What about you? —"

Herb tossed the currycomb nonchalantly into the rack and picking up the big black brush he began using it on Monday-Washing's fine-spun tail.

"Yes, what about me!"

"You think more of that mare than you think of me!"

"She's worth more! At least she's honest and square and don't try to be what God never made her to be in the first place. She gives me square service; she's always glad to see me; she loves me — a little bit! —"

Beside herself, the girl raised the parasol and sprang at the mare's head.

"So she loves you! Fiddlesticks!"

She struck the sociable little animal — one, two, three sharp blows across the head.

"Stop!" roared Herbert as the mare reared wildly.

He came around to the horse's head.

"Do that again and there'll be — trouble!" he said hoarsely.

"There'll be trouble! What kind of trouble? What will you do? What?"

He quieted his horse, stroking the silky nose and the quivering nostrils.

"Mibb," he said hoarsely, "you and me just don't hitch and the sooner we realize it the better. I've give you whatever you've wanted in the way o' money; I've bought this place and fixed it up for you just as you and that hellion of a mother o' yours

wanted. I said I'd be a sport and play square and perhaps try to get you to love me —"

"You talk as though you'd done me a favor by marrying me."

"Which I did. You never give a hoot for me. It was what cash I had access to that made you do it. If I'd been poor as Jack Purse you wouldn't have done it in a thousand years. But I was pretty well fixed and heart-hungry for a woman like —"

"Like Mary Purse!"

"Yes, like Mary Purse, God damn it! I'd asked Mary Purse to marry me and she'd turned me down because she couldn't love me somehow, only as a sister—and I was heart-broke. I was half crazy the night I heard she was marryin' Jack, and anything in petticoats that'd show some aspects o' womanhood, I'd a-married at the drop of a hat just to feel I was hitched to somebody and had some interest in life —"

"And I came along and was picked up and married like a hand-me-down!"

"Call it what you like. I married you thinkin' you'd give at least value received for what I'd try to do for you. But it's been a miserable farce from first to last and every day always makes it worse. The place ain't far off where it'll all come to an end. There just ain't nothin' to you, Mibb. Not even sympathy. A man can forgive a woman for every sin in the decalogue and put up with every vice and selfishness a small-bored woman can contract — so long as she gives him sympathy in what he is and what he's tryin' to do. A man's a brute, too, to make a woman have youngsters that she don't want 'em and even that won't break his love and regard for her if — if — she's sympathetic. But —"

"So it's sympathy you want?"

She stepped up to him and asked him the question viciously.

"It's somethin' —"

"It's sympathy you want?"

With drawn face, tired eyes, he raised his head and looked at her.

And as he did so, she struck him! — struck him a swift, sharp blow across his face.

"You — you — Jezebel!" whispered Herb hoarsely.

"I won't have to be asked to get out twice," she said.

She turned abruptly and walked out.

He put his grimy hand up to his face and drew it away as though half expecting to see blood on the place where she had struck him. Finding none, he stood there for a moment, stroking the mare's forgiving head, his eyes looking wistfully far away.

Then he walked over and sat down on the lowest of the hayloft stairs.

For half an hour he simply sat there, his face in his hands.

Two nights later we ran this item in our paper.

Mrs. Harvey Henderson, with her daughter, Mrs. Herbert Truman, with whom she has been making her home since the daughter's marriage, left town last evening for a week's stay in New York, following which they will sail for a three-months' trip to Europe. Mrs. Silas Truman, Mr. Truman's mother, will keep house for her son during the wife's absence.

Mibb Truman, nee Henderson, had "left" her husband.

CHAPTER VI

IN WHICH THE PURSES' "SHIP COMES IN" — YET
A RATHER DIMINUTIVE LITTLE VESSEL WITH
ONLY A MODEST CARGO IN HER HOLDS BUT HER
DECKS PILED HIGH WITH HUMAN HAPPINESS.

THINGS droned along in our little town for a month or so after Mabel and her mother left. Some one asked Herb in Jimmy Stiles' barber shop one night why he hadn't gone with them.

"I wanted 'em to enjoy the trip — if they can," he replied and walked out, leaving the boys wondering exactly what he meant.

"Some one ought to take a harness tug to them Hendersons — mother and daughter!" declared Uncle Joe Fodder from a corner. "Every dog may have his day but the Bible never said nothin' about the cats! And Herb — he's a good man goin' all to pieces just because things ain't natural somewheres. You know what I mean. Bud Matherson was in my place yesterday to get a rig to take that red-headed Peters girl up 'spoon' river. He says the day after Mibb and her mother got out in such a nice pretty dignified way, Herb was all clogged up with liquor and had to go home in the afternoon and sleep it off. The boy's goin' to hell and I don't know's I blame him!"

Herb on the night in question emerged from the barber shop and started up Maple Street. At the foot of the hill he met Mary and Jack, coming down

arm-in-arm. With a cry of delight, Mary saw him and ran up to him.

"Herbert! Herbert!" she cried, her face shining, her voice atremble. "What do you suppose has happened to us, Herbert?"

"I dunno."

"Jack and I are going to inherit money! It's from an uncle in Chicago I've never seen. He died and left us his estate. The executor turned it into cash and has sent the money on to Judge Farmer for us. Mr. Farmer's little boy just brought us word that it's come. We're going down after it now."

"Money?" said Herb. He spoke the word as though it were tar and acid in his mouth. "How much?"

"We don't know yet." She was a little sobered by Herbert's indifference.

"Aren't you glad for us, Herbert?"

"That," the other replied, "depends on how much it is!" He moved away. "I ain't feelin' just right to-night," he explained. "Excuse me."

Mary looked after him sadly.

Then she turned and continued her energetic walk downtown with Jack. After a few blocks she said:

"Did you smell his breath? It's too bad, Jack. Somehow I feel personally responsible. And yet I couldn't do any different, could I?"

"What do you mean?" Jack demanded sharply.

"Some day, Jack," she said, "I'll tell you!"

And nothing more could the husband get from the wife of his heart.

They found Judge Farmer as before busy over his law books — or pretending to be — and pompous and dignified and inclined to ceremony.

"You -- sent for us?" asked Mary.

"I did, Mrs. Purse. I have heard from Chicago that the Wood estate has been entirely settled and all the law been complied with."

"And Uncle Josiah actually did leave us his money?"

"At least to you, Mrs. Purse," smiled the Judge.

"And when will it arrive, do you think?" she asked. "You see, if it's of any size I've made so many plans for it --"

"I have the check here on my desk -- and the papers. They arrived this afternoon."

"You -- have -- the -- money -- here?"

"Yes. But I warned you not to expect too much."

"If it's only enough to pay up our debts and leave us free just to work and save for ourselves and the youngsters, I'll thank the dear God humbly!" the girl declared.

"Youngsters!" cried the Judge. "There isn't but one, is there?"

"Suppose we get to the business!" exclaimed Jack suddenly.

The color gradually became normal in the young woman's face. Judge Farmer spread out more official-looking documents. He finished with the arrangement of the papers and lastly on the top he laid a long narrow slip of pink paper face downward.

"How much are your debts?" he asked. "I suppose you are referring to the bankruptcy of Jack's father."

"Those debts of mine will never be paid with Mary's legacy if it's a million dollars!" declared Jack grimly.

Mary placed a hand over his mouth. Playfully holding it there she replied:

"Three thousand, seven hundred and eighty dollars right this minute, Judge." Then she gathered herself together as though to meet a shock and asked: "Will — the legacy — cover it, Judge?"

It was very quiet in the little corner room. A clock ticked on the wall opposite Webster's picture. A blue bottle fly buzzed against a dusty window.

"It will," said the Judge. "The amount left you comes to five thousand and five hundred and fifty dollars and twenty-five cents!"

Mary was the first to speak.

"It pays the debts," she declared hoarsely, "and Jack, it leaves us — it leaves us — with a whole thousand dollars over, for you to get into some business!"

Jack leaped up and walked to the window. He stood looking down into the square.

"Don't be a fool, young man," declared the Judge. "You've got a wife that loves you. Thank God for her!"

"It cheats me! Cheats me out of the satisfaction of making a real effort to come up to the scratch."

"Tommyrot, young man!" retorted Farmer. "I guess you find the job of raising those youngsters — that youngster! — hard enough without looking for a slow smouldering financial fire to make you a martyr to your principles."

"It's Mary's money — I'll never touch it!"

Mary had the check in her hands. She winked at the Judge and made a gesture not to mind anything Jack might say. Then her eyes sought the figures on the paper — figures which in those days meant a competency, figures which to her poor financially starved scheme of things meant a for-

tune. If it had been fifty or a hundred thousand dollars, the amount could have meant no more.

Fifty-five hundreds of dollars !

The figures swam before her gaze. Frantically she fingered in her bosom for her handkerchief. She sank down into the chair, her pretty brown head bowed in her arms on the edge of the Judge's table.

"What are you weeping for?" demanded Farmer.

"That's the way a woman signifies she's having a good time," declared Jack grimly, without looking around.

The papers and receipts were duly signed, sealed and delivered. The check formally became her property. The Judge said they didn't owe him anything; he'd been paid from Chicago. He shook hands with them elaborately and they went out.

Mary carried the check all the way home in her hand. Jack spoke not a word.

"Jack," she pleaded, "can't you act as happy over it as I would have been if you had been the one left the money?"

"It's — different," choked Jack. "It puts me in a worse position than ever. I'm frantic at times about getting ahead."

"We've got a start now," she declared.

"Mary," he begged, "keep that money in your own bank account — for yourself. I want to make good for the sake of my own pride — for the sake of doing it."

She put the check in the clock for safe keeping until morning. After Jack had dropped asleep she stole out of bed and took it out of the clock. What of robbers? Fire? It was an awful responsibility — this having such vast wealth loose around the house. She got an envelope and tucked it under

her pillow and fell asleep at last to see visions and dream dreams. And Thomas Joshua, awake early in the morning — an idiosyncrasy peculiar to infants in some quarters — saw a corner of the envelope protruding from beneath his mother's pillow just above his head and drew it forth. Kind angels awakened Mary, and a wild shriek awakened Jack. For Thomas Joshua was just preparing to eat fifty-five hundreds of dollars at one vast extravagant gulp.

One week later we took a batch of mail out and passed it to Jack across the imposing stone.

Purse ran over many of the corner-cards on the envelopes and his face wore a frightened look.

"Duns!" he cried. "But why have they arrived all at once?"

He ripped one open and read!

Dear Sir:

We enclose herewith receipt in full for the money owed us on North Sidney Bulletin invoices after-settlement of twenty cents on the dollar by Judge Atherton. Please accept our sincere thanks for the same. You have acted very fairly in this matter.

Envelope after envelope he tore open until there was a waste basket of papered clutter on the forms he was making up. And when he realized what had happened he went over and sat down by the big press and ran his fingers through his hair until it was a worse mess than Herb's cowlick had been in its wildest days.

Sam came over and wanted to know what had happened.

"Poor Mary's gone to work — and paid up —

everything I owe or ever have owed, out of that legacy she got from her uncle."

He rubbed his hands nervously together.

"Well, what did you want her to do — buy a horse-car line?"

"No, but —"

"But what?"

"Can't you understand how I feel about it — having a woman pay my bills?"

"Yes, I can. But I can feel too what pleasure it gave to Mary when she did it."

"Pleasure! Spending money by mailing it out to a list of names and never getting a thing but so many thank you's?"

"Of feeling that she has been able to really help you out of a bad situation. Young man, you've got a family and a future to work for and the god of luck has freed you from debt. Show what's in you; go at your task of winning success with the idea that when the time comes, you'll pay Mary back a thousandfold."

Jack went back to his stones, gathered up his mail sadly and put it in his pocket.

He drew Mary to him that noontime with great terrible man tears rolling down his cheeks. Gripped in his embrace, her own features shining, she knew then that he knew what she had done.

"The rest — oh, Mary — keep the rest — for Tommy's education. Promise me!"

"The rest goes to help you get into some good business. Then the business can pay for Thomas Joshua's education through theological school!"

Mrs. Hod came over to the Purses' that evening after some thread to match her mauve silk. As she declared afterward, if she'd seen the ghost of Julius

Caesar walk into the room dressed in a Japanese umbrella and a pair of rubber boots, she couldn't have been more startled than when she heard Jack Purse striding up and down the kitchen and — *swearing*.

"What's happened?" gasped that good lady, properly horrified.

"Oh, I took the legacy money, you know, and paid all the bills so that we're free — free — free! And Jack's out there cussing over it. Let him alone! That's the way a man signifies he's having a good time!" answered Mary sweetly.

CHAPTER VII

THE MILLS OF THE GODS GRIND SLOWLY ONWARD
AND THE PURSES HAVE A SUDDEN ADDITION TO
THEIR FAMILY WITH WHICH THE STORK HAS
NOTHING TO DO.

LET us turn back to the files. Having elaborated on the "lead stories" found in those blurred pages and having a special significance to our narrative, let us skim through half a dozen items of minor importance.

For instance, here is a brief account of the marriage of Esmeralda Truman to some chap in New York with a name like a villain in the Seaside Library. And a few months further on we note that Mrs. Silas Truman has left for New York to make her home with her daughter and that her son Herbert will reside temporarily at the Whitney House. We were gullible enough for a time to believe that Mrs. Truman Senior's explanation "daughter needs me" was tantamount to announcing that Esmeralda wanted her mother near her through the advent of a youngster. We subsequently demonstrated that she was one of those women who must have a background against which the lights and shadows of her character can be shown to advantage. The Seaside-Library husband having a will of his own, however, and a jaw too square to allow his wife to get away with her rôle of Mrs. Hawksbee, the mother was sent

for and we understand she fulfilled her function faithfully until death.

Four months further along in the files, we come to the ending of the pitiful, miserable career of Mary's half-brother, the idiot Artie, in an asylum down in Massachusetts. The body was sent back to Foxboro for interment and laid beside his father and mother in the family lot. There was a prayer at the grave. The casket was not opened.

When we lie back in an old office chair with a friendly pipe in the quiet hours and think of the changes which the last thirty years have wrought, more and more do we come to think of life only as a constant readjustment, a constant replacing of new faces for old, a constant swapping of friendships and exchanging of the old and antiquated for the better. After all, the only thing permanent in life is change. The sane and happy person is he who can accept life as such and adapt himself most quickly and thoroughly to the circumstances.

As for Jack and Mary Purse, the files place all their family vicissitudes in very orderly and quite rational fashion. But if we had no great diary of the town's life to thus guide us and if we were dependent upon memory alone, we would have set it down that the babies seemed to come along in the Purse household in record-breaking fashion after the advent of Thomas Joshua. It was one of the unexplainable things in life that they should all have run to boys, but that is what happened. Fred and Theodore were born the fall after Mibb and her mother left Herbert and went to Europe, and Mary was busier in her little home than ever.

It is unexplainable also that the birth of twins should be looked upon by average American folks

as a joke on the parents. It was anything but a joke to Jack Purse. Not that he didn't love the youngsters as his life, but that he was beginning to grow gray at the temples prematurely, wondering when that business chance was coming along which should provide the money necessary for their bringing up and education.

We have always given Jack full credit; he tried to do his best by his family and his job. That was the pathos of it. There were times when panic seized him and he wondered if there was indeed any "future" before him, if all his energies and his life must be spent sticking to his job in the newspaper office which was steady and permanent, — and raising those boys without any great wealth of money but just rich in character and manhood, a little bit better men than their father had been before them, taught to avoid, if possible, their father's mistakes.

America is filled with that kind of men, men who feel as the days slip away and the bills keep coming in and money must be secured to meet them, that they may have already shot their bolt and missed; that the best part of their lives is passing; that the best they can do is to equip those young lives for whom they are responsible to take up the battle of life where their father left it off and carry it forward to a better conclusion. They are heroes, these fathers. They are the real blue-bloods and thoroughbreds by which this nation is great.

Thomas Joshua and Frederick and Theodore Herbert came along in those years while the Purses were living on Pleasant Street and Jack was drawing eighteen dollars a week in our office and looking for some kind of opening. And the year of the Truman

bankruptcy Richard Samuel put in his tiny appearance and demanded his rights as an infant and got them.

The year of the Truman bankruptcy! Let us refresh our memory by the files. Yes, it was in 1890 that the Truman Wagon Works went into the hands of the sheriff. It was in 1890 that changes took place in the lives of some of our story folk indeed.

It did not come wholly unexpected, the Truman bankruptcy. The town knew that Herb was drinking heavily, and that for some mysterious reason the Purses were trying desperately to save him. But for an equally mysterious reason, every time there was a new young one in the Purse home, Herb went on a spree — a terrible spree — and the last one ended in his being arrested and detained in Sheriff Crumpett's emporium under the town hall over night because behind the reins of Monday-Washing he was a menace to the safety of our public streets.

Judge Farmer, who had gone on the board of directors of the People's National Bank, gave it out that Mibb had drawn drafts on the husband which time and again cleaned Herb out of ready cash and once caused the wagon works to skip a pay roll. The Judge had a long talk with Herbert on that occasion and advised the husband to let the drafts be reported back as unpaid. But Herb said he couldn't do that. Mibb might have received money on them and if one came back unpaid it might lead to her arrest and all manner of scandal. Thereat the Judge secured Mabel's address and wrote her a harsh letter about which Herb never knew. For a time the sums she asked for were reasonable. When she drew a check on a big New York jewelry

house for a sum that would have supported the Purse family for a year and at the same time Herb had to sell the Holland place to meet some of his notes, the Judge knew the end was only a matter of time. The directors of the People's National called in Herb's paper. That finished him. He made an assignment.

Bud Matherson was placed in charge to run the business for a time for the benefit of the creditors.

Herb appeared one night at the Purses'. His clothes were wrinkled and his face unshaven. His eyes were a trifle bleared and his voice cracked. But he was far from being intoxicated.

Most bankrupts make frantic and hopeless effort to recoup. They try to convince their friends that the embarrassment is only temporary. They go around snapping rubber bands on papers and looking hopeful and important and then — as the tide goes against them — explaining to every one who will listen, exactly how it happened and that everybody else in the business was to blame but themselves. But Herb did none of these things. He was listless and silent and seemingly relieved that the responsibility had slipped from his shoulders. He got down on the floor and played with the little Purse boys until Jack came home from the shop and then with a sigh he got up and sat in a chair and became apologetic.

"Jack," he said unevenly, "I ain't ever asked many real favors o' you folks exceptin' to come over now and then and take your kids to a circus, have I?"

"No," Jack replied.

"I got one big favor to ask of you now."

Jack thought Herb wanted to borrow money.

He would have loaned it gladly had there been any prospect of getting it back, despite the fact that because of the youngsters and doctors and clothing and grocery bills Mary's fifteen hundred odd dollars remaining from the legacy had gradually dissolved until but eight hundred and fifty dollars were left.

"What is it, Herb?"

"How much money you got, Jack? That's personal, but I'd just like to know before I speak what I come for."

"We've got — several hundred dollars."

Herb fingered a baby's toy he picked from the floor. He dropped it a couple of times and picked it up again.

"Jack, I got an idea I'll do a little travelin'," he said. "I don't mean just down to New York, and back. I mean some real travelin' somewheres. Things has got pretty well snarled up here. I ain't got the stomach to try to straighten 'em out. I'm tired, Jack. I want a change o' scene and a rest."

"Yes."

"I've done the best I could by Mibb. My conscience don't hurt me none on that score. And this goin' away now — will be the best thing I ever did. After three years she'll be able to get a divorce for desertion; there ain't no other reason she could get one for. But, Jack, I can't go away until — until —"

"How much money do you want?"

"Two hundred aint far out o' the way, Jack."

Jack's heart sank. Two hundred dollars with practically no prospect of getting it back meant diminishing the legacy to six hundred and fifty dollars.

"That's rather steep, Herb."

"We won't argue about price between friends. I said two hundred warn't far out o' the way because she's worth that. But if you was only able to pay twenty-five dollars, Jack, I'd take it because I don't know anybody on earth I'd want to have her besides you and Mary."

"What on earth are you talking about? Who's she? Don't you want to borrow money?"

"No! I want you should have Monday-Washin' — because you'll treat her as I'd o' treated her if I'd stayed around. I can't take no horse and rig where I'm goin'!"

"Herbert!" cried Mary, anxiously entering from the kitchen. "You're not going to do anything foolish?"

"No, Mary. I'm goin' to do the wisest thing I've ever done in my life. Just goin' away, that's all."

"Herbert — you're not going to — to —"

"Yes, I'm goin' to part with Monday-Washin'. And I want to know you folks have got her. It ain't the cash; it's you takin' care o' her until she dies that I want to remember. I've had some nice rides behind Monday-Washin', Mary."

Like a flash Mary's thoughts fled back to the night when her stepfather had assaulted her and how she had first come to Paris behind the little animal; the ride with Herbert one Sunday afternoon in the autumn; the day in the office when Mibb had paraded her finery and Mary had wished that Monday-Washing might have been hers — to drive over the azure hills and far away.

"Yes, Herbert. Only we don't really need a horse, unless — unless —"

The husband and wife exchanged glances.

"Yes?"

“Unless we should move from here out to the edge of town where there’s room for the boys to grow. Our place here is getting somewhat cramped. Jack would probably need a horse to drive back and forth.”

“If I didn’t need a little money I’d give him to you. But I do need — a little money —”

“Herb,” declared the husband, “would you listen to a hundred and fifty dollars for the mare, harness and buggy?”

“She’s yourn,” Herb answered without hesitation.

CHAPTER VIII

MABEL TRUMAN, NÉE HENDERSON, COMES BACK TO PARIS IN A HIGH HUFF, AND GOES BACK TO NEW YORK WITH A BIG IDEA.

IT was a different Mabel Truman, *née* Henderson, who came back to Paris two years later. Mibb had matured in those years of absence. Maybe it had been the people she had met, the places she had frequented, the wider horizons or the removal of all horizons, that was responsible. She had gone away a cheap country-town spitfire covered with the veneer of easy money. She came back polished but not subdued, cultured but not refined, sophisticated but sadly lacking a sense of humor.

Naturally she had heard about the bankruptcy, for the money had stopped coming from Herbert. But she was not persuaded that the whole catastrophe was not a sharp lawyer's trick which some scheming parties somewhere had succeeded in putting over on provincial, easy-going Herb, and back she had come to "see about it."

She was stouter than when she had gone away. Her dress was less conspicuous and showed better taste. But there were tiny crowsfeet in the corners of her eyes and the faintest of faint wrinkles commencing to show in her neck, and she gravitated toward men and told them her troubles as naturally as a brook seeks the river and the river the sea. No one in Paris recalls a single instance where Mibb

took a woman into her confidence or sought her sympathy. But she hadn't been in town two hours before two strange drummers in the Whitney House were patting her hand and old man Ezekial's boy, who lived summers in the big house on Preston Hill, was thanking the Lord that the town had turned up a live one at last.

Mabel visited Judge Farmer first and met with such an icy reception that she came to Sam Hod with tears of mortification and rage in her eyes and demanded the price of space in the *Telegraph* so she could say publicly in print just what she thought of our leading attorney and banker.

Sam got her quieted down after a fashion, during which procedure he had difficulty to avoid Mibb weeping on his shoulder, and explained to her the law of libel and how a paper and not an individual contributor was held responsible for any such deliberate indiscretion. Then with eyes snapping and a very great deal of pompous and self-important fidgeting, she listened while Sam narrated as diplomatically as possible the vicissitudes of the carriage works under Herb's incompetent management.

"I made the mistake of my life," Mibb declared, "when I went away. I should have had the brains to stay here and personally take charge of the carriage work myself. What I cannot understand is this: What has become of all Herbert's money?"

"I guess what he didn't send you to New York or Florida or abroad, was lost by inefficiency and dishonesty at the factory," Sam replied. "Anyhow, the supply has stopped, Mabel. You've got to make up your mind to that."

"Of course I'll get what's left. That should be something."

"What's left!"

"After the bills are paid, I mean."

"My dear girl, Judge Farmer tells me that the effects won't enable the referee to pay more than twenty cents on the dollar."

"But I, as his wife, also have a claim!"

"Certainly not — at least not on the business. It was a corporation, you know, although Herbert owned nearly all the stock. All there is in the business goes to satisfy the creditors, and I understand that what Herbert personally owned he turned into cash before the assignment."

"He was rich!" retorted Mabel.

"Not so rich as most of the town imagined. You made a poor bet, Mibb, when you got it into your head you'd married a gold mine."

"But where is the man? Has he deserted me?"

"He went away one night about two months ago; no one saw him go; no one knows where he is. Poor Herb! He had been drinking heavily."

"Poor Herb — fiddlesticks! A weak character always takes to drink. What I want to know is, what's to become of me? I haven't had a remittance for two months. The last one was only a hundred and fifty dollars —"

"That must have been the cash he got for the mare," mused Sam.

"The mare? And that isn't mine? Who has it?"

"The Purses bought it."

"The Purses? Oh, yes, I believe I remember; the young couple with such a disgusting proclivity for babies. And they bought it! You're sure? Because if Herb simply gave it to them, they're going to find that Herb's wife is still in existence and not to be cast aside financially like an old glove."

"They bought it all right, and riding around in it with the space in front of them stuffed with small boys is the first recreation they've had come into their lives since they were married."

"I'm not interested in the recreation of the Purses! My husband had altogether too much to do with Mary Purse. If I thought there was a chance of bringing suit against Mary Purse and getting anything for the alienation of my husband's affections — they're doing that now in the best circles — I'd have the papers filed so quickly that —"

"And not a lawyer in town would take the case! Mabel, you are simply ridiculous."

"But I've got to have money. If Herbert has deserted me I've still got to live somehow —"

"Get a job and go to work."

"A job! Work! *Me!* After the people I've associated with; the set I move in —"

"I wouldn't let that worry me; no one here in town is the wiser."

"Now *you* are ridiculous!" the woman cried. Suddenly the truth dawned on her and she cried: "I'm a widow — without a widow's privileges! What shall I do — oh, what shall I do? If I could only get my hands on that Herbert Truman; if I only could!"

"You've had your hands on him for quite a spell and squeezed him dry. Better let it go at that, Mabel," and Sam hitched his chair up under him, lighted his pipe and prepared to go on with his interrupted editorial.

"I plainly see," she declared icily, "that I haven't a friend in this town."

"There's no especial reason why you should have, Mibb. You haven't exerted yourself greatly to

cultivate friendship. There is a very arbitrary law about such things, you know."

"Oh well," she snapped haughtily, "I dare say I know a few gentlemen friends who will not be above helping me temporarily."

"I dare say you do, Mibb!" grunted Sam grimly.

The door closed after the woman and Sam said a bad word.

It rained that afternoon, — a sudden thunder shower that pelted huge drops like marbles on to the dust-covered foliage, made Main Street merchants hustle their sidewalk displays indoors with frantic energy and sent the luckless townspeople caught on the streets into whatever shelters were at hand.

Mabel Truman in a lacy creation, embroidered parasol, bare head, and fingers ablaze with rings, chanced to be strolling down Union Street meditating hotly on her predicament when the shower came up. Casting frantically about for a place of shelter, she noted the deep portico of the Baptist church entrance. She made the protection just as the rain descended in a sudden cloud. At the top of the steps, the parasol obstructing the way, she bumped into a person who had taken refuge there a moment before, — a woman with an infant.

"I beg your pardon!" cried Mibb in her most adroit voice. And then she stiffened.

"Mabel!" cried Mary Purse. "You!"

"I was not aware you were here or I should have found a place from the rain elsewhere," the grass widow declared.

Mary looked at her finery wistfully. Then the dark eyes of Jack Purse's wife sought the other much-massaged face and lingered there.

"Why do you say that, Mabel?" she asked.
"What have you against me?"

"You ask me that!"

"I'm sure it's nothing I've done intentionally."

Mibb tapped her toe impatiently on the flagstone floor.

"No; I dare say you didn't know any better. You've been tied down to this town all your life; how could you!"

Mary did not reply. The shower increased. Great sweeps of rain clouded the atmosphere; gutters were choked, limbs of trees broke in the violence of the wind that swept a fine spray into the portico where the women waited. And while the thunder rattled and clacked and played about the upper air, Mibb held her head high and tapped her toe impatiently.

"I'm sure, Mabel, if there's anything I'm responsible for, I'm willing to apologize. You know —"

"You'd better!" snapped Mibb.

The apologetic, threadbare look, the gentle wistfulness of the other woman, somewhat touched Mabel and after a time she condescended to look around, stare her over and allow her very superior eyes to rest on the infant.

"I declare!" she said. "Hasn't that young one grown a bit in the last four years?"

"This isn't the baby you saw at my house. This is Richard — my fourth."

"Your *what*?"

"My fourth. Fred and Theodore, the twins, born while you were in — Europe. This one was born four months ago. We call him The Dickie-Bird."

"My Gawd!" cried Mibb. "And your husband is in business by this time, I suppose."

"No; he's — he's — still foreman in the newspaper office. There hasn't been exactly the business chance come along —"

"I know! Some men just simply haven't it in them to get ahead. Where are you living?"

"In the same place. But I don't think we'll be there much longer because the man who owns the property is going to sell for a building site. Jack and I are thinking awful seriously of buying the old place on Cobb Hill for a home. It's country out there and plenty of room for the boys to play and grow. Jack could drive back and forth mornings and evenings, you know. We — we — bought your horse."

"So I have heard," commented Mibb coldly. "But I thought you were poor! You talk of buying places as if —"

"O, but I had a legacy; not much but still a legacy. My Uncle Josiah in Chicago died and left us over five thousand dollars."

"How long ago?"

"About three years."

"I dare say it's spent by this time. I never saw folks who were baby-crazy who had the knack of hanging on to money."

"It — isn't — all spent. Anyhow, that's why Jack and I are talking about getting what's left into some sort of real estate before the whole legacy becomes exhausted. The bank's never been able to dispose of the Wheeler house and property because of what happened there. We can buy it for the mortgage and interest. We've got money enough to do that and I'm beginning to think it's a wise move. I'm — looking for my happiness — in other ways — than money."

"What do you know about what happiness money will buy," demanded Mibb "—you that's hardly been beyond the skyline in your life? Nonsense!"

"I don't," returned Mary, "and what I don't know won't hurt me."

"Poor little country bumpkin! Poor little fool!" declared Mibb. She wished the storm would end so she could leave. It was a most disconcerting predicament.

But Mary pretended not to be disparaged.

"How are things going with you, Mibb?" she asked politely.

"Beautifully, thank you."

"You're still singing, I suppose. You had a beautiful voice, I remember, when we worked in the office together. I remember very often the night you sang between the acts of the little local talent play. How very long ago that seems, doesn't it? And your voice should have improved much with time."

"I studied under the best masters while abroad," Mibb replied. It was a falsehood. She had not raised her voice while abroad above an ordinary tone except to hold up her end of an altercation with her mother. But it sounded well, this "best-masters" business.

"You are fortunate; it will stand you in good stead now."

"What do you mean?"

"Since Herbert — well, you know."

Yes, Mibb knew. She knew all too well. But she was furious to have it "thrown" at her by homely little Mary Purse in her last year's hat and coat with the baggy sleeves.

"I'll thank you to mind your own business.

You have financial troubles of your own, I understand, which should be quite sufficient for an ordinary person without interesting yourself in mine. I see the rain is letting up. I'll say good-afternoon."

Despite the wild wet, she raised her creamy parasol and was gone.

Mary, who watched her picking her dainty way among the broken boughs and sticks and miniature washouts, declared:

"Well, one thing's certain, Dicky-Bird, we don't look quite so old and burned out as she's commencing to look for all of our craze after babies!"

As for Mibb, she went down that devastated street with a Big Thought whirling in her head.

Mary Purse had given her an idea — a great idea!

CHAPTER IX

BACK IN THE OLD HOUSE ON THE COBB HILL ROAD,
THE PURSES SETTLE DOWN TO THE DAY TO DAY
EXPERIENCES OF PLAIN PEOPLE WHICH MAKES
JACK PURSE A FRANTIC MAN.

It was about the time we put in our linotype that Jack and Mary bought the old Wheeler place out on Cobb Hill. The man was plainly worried that he was never going to draw more than three dollars a day in our office and three dollars a day — with rents going up in the village — was not sufficient to raise the live-wire youngsters who were beginning to demonstrate that they were real boys. The day came when his landlord gave formal notice that the place was to be sold for a business block site, and on that day he and Mary took the remaining money out of the savings bank and the place passed back into the hands of the girl who had left it so sadly a decade before.

The first home on Pleasant Street which had stood for so much to them, was broken up. Ed Dickinson drove over from Foxboro with his big two-horse van one spring day and moved them. The musty old house was scrubbed and renovated and aired and painted. The bitter-sweet sorrow at leaving the little tenement on Pleasant Street was only offset for the woman by the satisfaction of the home-coming, — back to the old farm behind the maple trees near the top of Cobb Hill.

"I thought — when we moved from Pleasant Street at all — that it was to be so very different," Jack complained bitterly. "I thought it was rather going to be like the Holland place. After all, it's only a lonely old farm —"

"But the boys — they will have their childhood in the country, and after all, there's no blessing equal to that, Jack."

Jack knew it, but he refused to be consoled.

"I've got to do something!" he cried bitterly. "I've got to prove I'm not a failure! Damn the newspaper business. It takes and takes and never gives! It ties you down and squeezes the best that's in you out for some other person's profit. Why did I ever learn the trade of a printer?"

But if Jack realized he was headed toward failure, Mary too must have looked into the future after two more children — six in all — had come to her, and had it brought home to her that she had made the same mistake that her mother had made before her: that life would be but one dreary day of years — so much cooking, so much dishwashing, so much mending and cleaning and hanging out of clothes. Some day death would overtake her. There would be a plain average American small-town funeral with the relatives attending and the church choir rendering an anthem and a young local pastor not old enough yet, nor wise enough, to understand the hearts of human beings, who would mouth conventional funeral phrases and look gloomy and be more or less thankful when the ordeal was over. There would be a six-inch obituary down in a corner of our paper, perhaps sandwiched between a report of the county treasurer and a patent medicine advertisement. There would be a plain white stone out in the ceme-

tery on the hill, soon forgotten by all but a lonely man and God. It would be marked with the words: "Mary, Beloved Wife of John Purse. Born Sept. 15th, 1861. Died, April 8th, 19—." Life, like her wedding day, like the dreams which she had dreamed, would have passed. The grass and the briar bloom would grow up around the headstone. She would be forgotten. Oh, the heart-rendering hopelessness of it.

But, in so far as any of us can recall, in so far as any of the folk in our town knew, those who came in contact with her after her sixth and final baby was born, never heard a word of complaint or bitterness from her lips. The features which had made her once the prettiest girl in Paris took on deep dull lines of work and worry and motherly anxiety. She was growing rapidly into a plain, middle-aged woman with nothing ahead but the successful manhood of her boys, like a million other wives of average men all over America tonight.

Mrs. Hod drove out to see her one afternoon and stayed to supper. After supper they went up to the front bedroom — Mary's old room under the eaves — to hunt up some dress patterns. The moon came up while they were there and the frogs down in the marsh began their piping. It was a dreamy, beautiful hour.

Mary grew suddenly silent. From her place in the rocker by the window Mrs. Hod glanced across in the deep deep shadow to where Mary sat on the bed. The girl suddenly began sobbing. Then to Mrs. Hod's surprise, Mary Purse leaned across and kneeled suddenly down with her head in Mrs. Hod's lap. There she wept convulsively.

"Mother, mother!" Mary cried. "At least he's

kind to me ; he loves me. But I understand, mother. I understand ! ”

“ I ’spose you’ve heard about Mibb Truman,” said Mrs. Hod, attempting to get the girl’s mind on to another subject.

“ What about her ? ”

“ I understand she’s gone on the stage — the concert stage — singin’. The Mathers went to New York last week and looked her up. She wasn’t at all nice to ’em. But they learned that some of her gentlemen friends down there have backed her financially and that wonderful voice o’ hers seems to be doin’ the rest. She always did have a wonderful voice. You remember it ? ”

“ Yes,” said Mary dully. She was plainly not interested in the Henderson girl’s fortunes, having forsooth her own pitiful fortunes to occupy her mind.

Mrs. Hod comforted her and after a while Mary arose and wiped her eyes.

“ I’m sorry, Mrs. Hod. Once in a while I feel weak and helpless. What I need, I suppose, is some real sorrow to make me strong.”

“ There’s trouble enough comes to us in life without wishing for it, dear. You’re all right. You’re only worrying over Jack because he doesn’t get into business.”

“ No ; I’m worrying over Jack because Jack is worrying that he doesn’t get into business. He’s afraid to make the break, Mrs. Hod. He’s afraid to leave his sure job for a brilliant uncertainty. And our capital is gone now, you know I paid the bills with the largest part of it and the rest I put into buying this house so we could at least be sure of a roof over our heads. That makes Jack timid about

taking chances; he's got the responsibilities of so many on him."

"Has he had many chances?"

"Yes; there's been the Red Front grocery which he felt he couldn't swing because he didn't have the capital; there's been the newspaper at Saugus and the job-printing business that Daddy Joe finally bought and that I understand he's doing well in. There's been Jim Galloway's rustless fire-screen business and the sash-and-blind mill. All of them were good businesses and would have made us fairly well-fixed in time. But most of them needed money — quite a lot of it — and somehow — the boys have taken most of our money."

"I know how it is, dear. It's too bad Jack couldn't have found something before so many babies came. Not," she added, "that I'm saying a word against them; they're beautiful boys — there aren't six boys in the whole world any beautifuller — excepting three that I happen to have down at the Hod place on Walnut Street in Paris. But still—it's unfortunate."

"Jack's especially wild just now because — you won't tell a soul will you, Mrs. Hod?"

"Certainly not, dear." She stroked the black hair just beginning to fleck with gray. "Haven't I and Mr. Hod proved that we're your friends?"

"Well, then, Jack's especially wild just now because he thinks he's discovered something on the Osgood farm that may prove valuable — a sort of ore — and he can buy the land for a thousand dollars. Only he hasn't got the thousand dollars and even if he had it, he lacks the money to develop it."

"What kind of ore, dear?"

"Some kind of yellow dirt that's in great demand just now for paint. Ochre — isn't that it? Yes!

There's a huge bed of it on the Osgood place along the South Fork of Sheppard's brook. Jack had it sent away and analyzed and then got a figure on the Osgood place because the Osgoods want to sell and move to Montpelier. But it's all money — money — money — again. And, well, there's our money, Mrs. Hod, out there in the moonlight kicking their heels on the corner. Hear them?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Hod, "Sam and I have got quite a bit of change tied up in the same way. I know how you feel, Mary. I've been there!"

It was true that Jack Purse at last had tumbled on to something of business value. A huge ochre bed by some freak of nature had been deposited along the south fork of Sheppard's brook where it flowed across the Osgood place. Old man Osgood cared nothing about ochre and had no money to develop it or small ambition to place value on what his farm contained. He wanted to sell and move down to Montpelier with his eldest son and go into the harness business. If Jack really wanted it, he could have a six-month option on the property for a hundred dollars, because old man Osgood had as soon stay on his farm for that last summer as anywhere.

Jack had a hundred dollars. He bought that option. He disclosed to Sam Hod what he had done. We think he had an idea for a time, that Sam Hod might go on his note and help him raise the money, and so indeed Sam might have done had not Jim Thorne started a rival newspaper in Paris that year and given us a lot of trouble across the street. It took every cent we could buy, beg, borrow or steal, to keep the *Telegraph* above water that summer and fall, and the chill days of autumn came with Jack as handicapped and discouraged as ever.

One night in early November he came home through the first fall of snow with a grim white look on his face. Mary stood by the stove frying potatoes for the evening meal. She looked up with a faithful smile on her plain features as he entered, but he hardly noticed her. He went to the sink and washed and stood for an unusual time drying his hands on the roller towel.

The smile died from Mary's face as Jack ignored her. There was a sudden pain in her heart. She had not minded — much — when he had left off meeting her after the day's work with a caress. But to be ignored — after a lonely day with the thoughtless youngsters — it brought the fear of her mother's words into her soul and her mother's prophecy. She burned her hand on the hot griddle but she did not cry out. She put the stinging patch of flesh to her lips for a moment and then shoved the griddle to the rear of the stove. The last baby, Dexter Farrington Purse, cried suddenly from the inner room, a wail of anguish that sent the mother flying to his side. In a moment she was back. But Jack had been watching her as he dried his hands at the towel and he suddenly came over.

"Mary," he said thickly, "you have it pretty hard, don't you? First one thing and then another — all day long. It wasn't a life like this we were thinking of living together at thirty-five, was it, Mary?"

He made her relinquish the griddle and the dish into which the contents were being emptied. He turned her about and took her in his arms.

"Mary," he said, lifting her face up toward his, "you never say anything; you never complain; day after day you stay out here in the country quiet,

and keep plugging away — the wife of a poor printer who can't seem to get ahead. Oh, Mary girl, I love you!"

"I'm looking for my pleasure in life in other ways, Jack," she replied softly. "I guess, Jack, I've changed my standards, else I'd given out long ago."

"I may not say a lot, Mary dear, but — but — I haven't forgotten and I — I — appreciate —"

He drew her closer to him and crushed her suddenly. In the dining room Richard, age eight, was busy on the red tablecloth with Frederick, age eleven, disemboweling a clock which would never run again. Jack in his stocking feet would later find many of the cogwheels on the carpet. Richard chanced to glance up and was hypnotized.

"Lookit!" he exclaimed to his brothers watching the process of clock surgery, "*paw's kissin' maw!*"

The small Templeton boys came in after supper to play until eight o'clock with the Purse young ones. Mary sent them, ruined clock, muddy boots, hand-fuls of cogwheels and all — into the back kitchen.

"What's the matter, Jack," she asked her husband when the boys were out of earshot. "Is it the ochre option that's worrying you?"

"Yes. Old man Osgood was in Paris this afternoon shopping. He said Joel Sibley has made him a cash offer for the farm and wanted to know if I cared to exercise my option."

"Jack," said the wife, "you mustn't make yourself ill over this business. You're half-dead now with worry and overwork and keeping such hours as you've been doing lately."

He rubbed his hands over tired eyes — eyes that felt like two burnt holes in a woolen blanket.

"I know it," he admitted. "But this ochre bed looks like such a good chance, and I've read up so much on it and know just how to go about doing it — working it up into a big business — that I'm about crazy to see it slip away as other business propositions have had to go by the board because I didn't have the money."

"Jack, this time why do you let it go by the board? Why don't you raise the money?"

"But how can I raise the money when I've got nothing to raise it on? A mortgage on this place wouldn't net two hundred dollars. The bank had one stiff lesson with it —"

"I mean if you can't raise the money out of your own resources, use some one else's."

"Who for instance? I did think of asking Sam Hod —"

"Jack, I've been thinking; why don't you go see Mr. Ezekial? You know who I mean, — the old man who comes up to the place on Preston Hill summers. He's got loads of cash; you know that."

"And knows how to hang on to it!" declared Jack grimly. "What chance would I stand going up to him and trying to interest him in a little jelly-bean ochre bed like this when he could buy all of Foxboro and Paris put together and never miss it from his account? And even if he did put in the cash, — even if I did interest him, — how could I, with nothing, keep control?"

"I don't know. But I don't believe old man Ezekial is anything like what gossip paints him. I can't understand how a man who really was all that people claim him to be could have such an awful nice daughter. I've met Martha Ezekial several times at Ladies' Aid meetings, you know; she's just

common and ordinary like other folks, only she's politer and kinder and softer spoken — sort of finer grained."

"She's real aristocracy," declared Jack, "to distinguish from Mibb Truman's brand."

"Why not go to old Mr. Ezekial and tell him honestly just what you've found and what you think you could do, and ask him to assist you —"

"Because," said Jack, "I'm too wise. Because I know how business is done and how men like Old Zeke — as they call him — are pestered to death every day of their lives with industrial propositions of this kind."

"Jack, dear, you don't know — you can't be certain — until you've tried. And isn't it worth — the trial?"

"The cowardice of wisdom, Mary," the man cried, leaning forward in his battered Morris chair, "makes it appear ridiculous." He arose angrily and paced the floor.

For Jack knew that deep in his heart he lacked the courage to go up to Old Zeke's fine home on Preston Hill and beard the old money bear in his den and try to put across any such proposition. Part of his hesitation might have been the cowardice of wisdom — yes. But it was more physical courage that detained him.

Mary got out her weekly washing, gathered from the clothes lines just before the twilight began to spit snow, and started her sprinkling, her ironing-board across two chairs. Jack sat in the Morris chair beside the reading table under the dining-room clock and tried to make sense out of the newspaper he had that day printed and produced. But he could not.

The Templeton boys and three of his own youngsters had secured permission to carry out some experiment in the side bedroom and he heard the dull drone of their voices and the shrill declarations and contentions as they employed themselves after the fashion of boys in that final hour before they were called to go to bed.

"Our father made that!" declared Dexter proudly referring to some toy or implement whose identity Jack could not determine.

"Huh!" retorted one of the small Templeton boys, "our father made a bigger one than that and it had six sides to it, too."

"Your father ain't half so wonderful or smart as our father is. Your father's only a farmer, and our father makes a whole newspaper and bosses everybody all over the place. He's the most wonderful man in the world, our father is!" Freddie grew emotional. "He ain't afraid o' nothin' and he can do anything. He can lick your father with one hand tied behind him and if you say he can't I'll *do* you right here and now —"

Jack heard no more. He sprang from his chair and paced the floor. His boys thought him the most wonderful man in the world; the man who could do everything; the man afraid of nothing. And he couldn't raise a thousand dollars to buy an ochre bed estimated to be worth a competency!

"Jack!" cried his wife. "What is the matter? Where are you going?"

"Crazy!" he retorted. Pulling down his hat he passed out into the cold raw night.

He walked in the darkness of early evening down to the ochre beds. They were covered with the light blanket of snow but it was the exertion the man

wanted, — the feeling of doing something beside sitting helplessly in a chair.

Over and over in his mind he turned all the men who were likely to aid him in developing such a business. One by one they were eliminated. There was Old Zeke, of course, but the proposition of Old Zeke helping out was nothing but the wild imagery of a wife's business ignorance. What should he do? What should he do? He hated himself for this weakness. He felt tired out, worn out, played out! Yet he must do something. He must not let his proposition go through his grasp. There might never be another like it!

He must have walked around the south part of the Osgood property for an hour in the falling snow which quickly turned to slush. Then he dragged his tired limbs back to the house. He opened the door.

He was startled to see a strange woman in the kitchen. It was Edith Crosswell from the Gilbert Mills road. She sat before the kitchen stove reading the evening's *Telegraph*.

"Why, — where's Mary?" Jack demanded.

"Where are you?" demanded Edith. She was a red-headed girl with big feet, square shoulders and a hard mouth. She put down the paper and surveyed him critically. "I come over to borrow some yeast because Ma's just got to make bread to-morrow if we're not buried under fifty feet o' snowdrift. 'Edith,' says your wife, 'you're a godsend. Would you look after the young-uns for the evenin' while I hitch up the 'orse and make a quick trip down to Paris,' says she, 'It's urgent,' she says."

"To Paris!" gasped Jack. "Mary's gone to Paris? At this time of night?"

"T'aint eight o'clock yet and it only takes an half hour to drive to Paris. She's been gone half that time already."

"Did she say — who she was going to see in Paris?"

"No; but she put on her Sunday-go-to-meetin' bib-and-tucker."

Jack found his way into the other room and sank down, wet though he was, into the Morris chair. Mary gone to Paris! What other errand could she possibly have but to attempt with the courage of ignorance what he with his cowardice of wisdom had declared impossible. He knew that old man Ezekial was spending the Thanksgiving holidays at his Preston Hill home. Our paper a few nights before had said so. Mary had taken their dilemma by the horns. She had gone into town at eight o'clock of a miserable night to meet the rich man and plead for capital for her husband.

Hot, burning shame came over Jack as he sat there. What a small, miserable piece of masculine humanity he was, anyhow! What a failure as a husband and a father he had been. Before marriage he had courted the girl with fair promises and golden predictions. She had loved him because of his ambition, the goals which he had set for himself. And how had that marriage turned out? What were the fair promises, the golden predictions, the ambitions, the goals, — what but words, words, words? The ugly fact remained that despite the time which had passed, despite the good health with which he and Mary had been blessed, eleven years after marriage found him in the same job he had held a decade before, drawing the same money, content perforce with the same kind of home, as far as ever from the

dreams he had dreamed of the future. Why? Because he lacked the courage to do exactly what his wife was probably doing at the moment.

And had his wife not done enough? Had she not been kind, sympathetic with all his weaknesses, patient with the privations, uncomplaining with the pain and labors of motherhood, generous almost to censure with the small fortune her uncle had left her? Had she not done all he could expect of her and more, without stepping into the situation now and trying with her frail strength and homely courage to succeed where he had failed?

He started from his chair with a cry. Edith heard him and brought her big feet down from the edge of the oven door with a startled clump.

"Where be you going, Jack Purse?" she demanded.

"I'm going to show I won't be a spineless weakling any longer!" Jack cried. He took down his overcoat and went out.

"Something," declared Edith to the stove, "is the matter with this here family!"

CHAPTER X

IN WHICH A LIFE-WEARY MAN PUTS HIS TROUBLES
UP TO A WORLD-WISE FATHERLY OLD FELLOW
AND THINGS BEGIN TO LOOK UP FOR THE PURSES

JACK slopped along the six miles into Paris hoping against hope that he could reach Preston Hill before Mary left. If he could only do that, he could explain to old man Ezekial that he had not put her "up to it", that she had interviewed him of her own accord and in her ignorance of the ways in which men did business and looked upon such things. He would try to convince the old financier that he was not the kind that had to send women to plead for him: that was the shame of it.

Down below McDermott's he heard a horse and rig coming along through the muck and slush of the road. He recognized Timothy Bailey's old white horse and high-bodied buggy. He stepped out in front.

"Tim, Tim," he cried, "have you just come from Paris?"

The long, lank young farmer declared that he had.

"Did you pass my little black mare on the road, with my wife driving her?"

"Reckon I did," returned Tim, "down near Marshall Mills pond bottoms."

"Tim, would you turn your horse around and drive like the devil to overtake her? I'll pay you well!"

"You'll pay me! Drive like the devil! Say, what th' hell, Jack? Your woman ain't runnin' away from you, be she?"

"No, she's started on an errand to Paris that's an awful mistake and misunderstanding. I've got to reach her before she gets to a certain party. Please, Timothy!"

Timothy clumsily backed his old white horse about and the two men splattered back toward the town.

Twenty-five minutes later they reached the top of Preston Hill on the west side of Paris village and turned south on Vermont Avenue. Here stretched our residential section containing the homes of our summer people. One fine old-fashioned place with broad verandas stood back from the walk amid a lawn dotted with silver birches. At the hitching post a rig was tied. Jack Purse recognized the horse from afar.

"Old Zeke's place!" echoed Timothy. "Cripes! What's your woman doin' at old Zeke's?"

"I can't tell you — now," returned Jack. "How much for bringing me here, Tim? You don't need to wait. I'll drive home with Mary."

"I guess you don't owe me — nothin'. I had trouble with my women folks myself. We all do!"

He would take no pay. Jack alighted and went up the walk.

Panic seized him as he approached the enormous pile which he had always viewed from the street and which increased in size and ominous dignity like a nightmare as he came close. He could never ring the bell and go into this house and face the man of whom a leading financial writer had once penned: "— when E. E. Ezekial takes snuff we all sneeze!"

And yet Mary was in there now, putting him to shame. And Timothy Bailey was down at the end of the walk, standing up in his buggy and watching to behold the miracle of Jack Purse gaining an entrance to the "swellest" place in Paris, and ready with embarrassing questions if he went soft now and turned back. He had to go on. He pulled the china-white knob of the bell as in a dream.

A horse-faced manservant came in response to the summons. He snapped on a light over Jack's head and the whole broad veranda was illumined.

"I want to see — Mr. Ezekial. I've got to see him on something real important. Purse is the name. — I'm from the local newspaper."

"Wait here," directed the servant. "I believe Mr. Ezekial is busy at present."

"Yes, I know! Tell him that's just what I want to see him about. I'll not take No for an answer. I — I — can't!"

The servant left the big glass door ajar. In a moment he was back.

"Mr. Ezekial says he'll give you fifteen minutes — because you're on the local paper. Follow me!"

He led Jack into a richly appointed hall and up a wide staircase. They turned the balustrade post in front of a stained-glass window with a luxurious window seat and went down the upper hall. At a door on the right the servant tapped.

"All right!" declared a heavy voice.

Jack was being consumed with ague and nerves. His thoughts were confused, his vision blurred. He only knew he was going to make some sort of an apology to old man Ezekial, explain that it didn't matter what his wife had asked, he knew how business men looked on such things and would seek the

capital in the proper channels or not at all. The servant with the elongated features stepped aside for him to pass. And Jack entered Old Zeke's study.

He saw red walls hung with paintings in gold frames. He saw a fire crackling comfortably in the grate. Across an immense flat-topped secretary desk at the north side he saw a very clean and white elderly man facing him, — a William H. Taft of a man with a substantial jaw, not unkindly eyes, and heavy white moustache.

But there was no woman!

For a moment Jack stood gaping like an idiot.

"Where's my wife?" he demanded.

The elderly man laid his pen across a mammoth bronze inkwell.

"Your what?" he demanded sharply.

"My wife! Where is she? I thought she was here!"

Old Zeke, during his long career in Boston, New York and Chicago, had met up with many fanatics. But here was a specimen that puzzled him. Overbrilliant eyes, snowsplashed clothes, muddy shoes, nervous and not over-clean hands: Jack Purse was not one to inspire confidence in any scheme involving the investment of money. Jack realized this perfectly. He had not come for money. He had come for his wife. And his wife — wasn't here. He felt like a condemned man on the scaffold who has steeled himself for the shock of the sprung trap and the hanging, been suddenly interrupted. As for the very clean and very white old man, immediately he sensed some sort of conspiracy. Yet he was mystified. In his own home, surrounded by his family and servants, the *modus operandi* of the intrigue was certainly novel.

"Your wife!" repeated the financier. "I haven't got your wife here. What made you think that I had?"

"She came here. I know it. Her buggy is hitched out in front."

E. E. Ezekial raised a bushy eyebrow.

"Indeed! And what would your wife be coming here for?"

"Womanlike, she was coming to you for money — for my business."

"Womanlike!"

"Yes; she didn't know any better. She didn't understand how men look at these things and that sentiment doesn't count. She only understood that I stood a big chance of making some money by securing the ochre beds and I've failed so many times that this time she was going to see what she could do."

"Young man, what on earth are you talking about? Who are you, anyway?"

"My name's Purse. I'm foreman at the local newspaper office."

"And what is it you're all wrought up about?"

"My wife coming here to ask you for money."

"But your wife hasn't been here to ask me for money."

"Then I'm glad — and relieved — and all I can do is to apologize."

"But what should prompt her to do such a thing? What kind of a wife have you got, anyhow?"

"A better than I deserve," Jack answered. He moved toward the door.

"Wait a minute, young man! This is a fine way to come in here and interrupt and mystify an old fellow. What's back of all this, anyhow?"

"It's too long a story to bother you with. I'd be only taking your valuable time."

"I'm the best judge of that. What's the matter with you? Are you ill?"

"I'm sort of wrought up with overwork and worry. When a man faces the proposition of bringing up six boys and educating them on the wages of a printing office, he realizes that unless he gets into business sometime, sooner or later, he's going to give out. Maybe I'm reaching that time."

"Six boys! Have you got six boys?"

"Yes, sir!"

"And a wife that goes around looking for capital for her husband's business?"

"Yes," miserably.

"Wait a minute, young man; don't be in such a damned hurry!"

The canny old financier and dealer in human nature saw suddenly a distraught, over-taxed, grimly honest young workingman who had reached a place in life's struggle where he knew not where to turn or what to do. He took note of the high forehead, the fine face, the direct eyes, the threadbare clothes, the bonafide embarrassment. And something in the picture touched him. Maybe the melancholy November night had something to do with it, and the rain tapping against the glass. Maybe it was the sorrow which had come to the old man that week of which our townspeople at the time had learned nothing. Maybe it was something deep within the reference to six growing boys and a wife who went after capital for her husband. Anyhow, old man Ezekial was suddenly kind, — just a very human and sympathetic old man who came around the corner of his desk and shoved an enormous leather chair

before the blazing logs for Jack and brought forward another for himself.

"Sit down, young man," he invited. "Sit down and let's visit for a little while. You look sort of played out."

"But your time is —"

"I'm tired of business to-night. It would be well for me if I laid it aside. I was only busying myself, trying to forget — something. Won't you sit down and — have a smoke?"

Have a smoke! With old man Ezekial, whose name was a financial flurry in six States! Jack moved forward in a daze, as though the request was a command.

He sank down into the luxurious chair, putting his wet cap behind him. His trousers' legs immediately began to steam. The old financier opened the top drawer of his desk and brought out a long thin cigar box. Jack took one of the Havanas with raw red fingers.

"Now then, just for the sake of some memories of my own, tell me about the wife and six boys and the — struggle to get into business."

"Mr. Ezekial, how can you possibly be interested in that?"

"We've all been there, son; we've all been there."

"Have you been there, Mr. Ezekial?"

"Certainly, young man. It's the life-story of American business from Maine to the Golden Gate all down the years."

Many dark days in the past eleven years had Jack longed for a father to whom he could go with his struggle and his perplexities and ask for advice. But there had been no father. He had never known that kind of parent. Men are only boys grown up.

Every man at some time or other has longed for the father of his boyhood to help him in the dark and bitter years of struggle and disappointment and heartache. There was nothing maudlin about the longing.

Here before the fire for the moment Jack Purse found himself with a kindly, successful old man, — verily, the father of his dreams. With the eternal boy-heart he told the story of his life and career thus far. He told of the death of his mother at twelve years, the newspaper business at North Sidney, the bankruptcy, the loss of his own father, the job in Paris. He told as best he could of his love affair, the girl's plight, the marriage, the home on Pleasant Street, the six sons for whose lives he had made himself responsible. There was no attempt at effect, no subtle plea for sympathy, for he was not that kind of man. He was simply tired, perplexed, baffled. He wanted to know what the world-wise old financier in his difficulty would do. And so he stated his case.

"You mean to tell me," demanded old Ezekial incredulously, "that you had fifty-five hundred dollars in your fingers to do what you wanted with and you went and paid it out for bills the court had declared it was legally unnecessary for you to settle?"

"Yes, sir. At least my wife did!"

"Why?"

"Those men put money into our business and gave us credit expecting to receive their money back. They'd turned over full value and done their part. Bankruptcy may be necessary in some cases but in this one it looked to me like a skin-game for those creditors. Legally, I didn't have to pay them; morally I did. So long as I was alive

and could earn the money that debt was just as pressing as if the court had not made my financial escape legal."

"And they got their money — every one in full."

"Yes, sir. One day while I was at work Mary found my list of creditors, with the sums I owed them, together with interest. Instead of putting the money into the savings bank, she put it into a checking account and she sat down and wrote checks for all of them and mailed them unbeknown to me until the receipts came in."

"My God!" cried the old financier. He forgot to smoke. He simply stared at the bedraggled printer with wide opened eyes. After a time he said:

"And what about this ochre bed you referred to? What's the story of that?"

Jack hesitated. Should he tell this old financial buccaneer about the deposit he had found on the Osgood farm; of old man Osgood's indifference to its value; of his willingness to sell for a puny thousand dollars?

The elderly man must have grasped what was passing in the other's mind.

"Go on, young man. Don't be afraid to tell me all about it. I may cut the throats of a gang of money buzzards now and then with lemonjuice in their guts but I haven't yet reached the place where I've found it necessary to rob the widows, orphans, school-teachers and struggling fathers with six babies. Tell me all about it!"

And Jack told him. And after he had brought the whole narrative down to the present moment there came a long silence in the rich apartment broken only by the crackling of the logs.

"We've all been there, son," repeated old Ezekial. "I know! I had a good woman once — like that."

"Once?"

"She's — dead. Dead these twenty-seven years!"

"Oh!" said Jack.

"I used to think I was the only one who had such an experience. I guess it's the life of American married folks the nation over. I'm rich now, I suppose. But I'd give it all, all, just to go back — to a home I once knew with a blue-eyed girl that's found a heaven — if there is one."

Old Zeke arose and went to his desk. He sat down there, smoking violently. Then he got up and paced the floor, his footfalls making no sound.

"Young man," he said huskily at the end of five minutes, "you've recalled things to me that I'm not sorry to have recalled — to-night. Only, I'm left in a sort of soft condition to talk business. Suppose, young man, that you come back and see me to-morrow afternoon?"

"Talk business, see you, to-morrow afternoon?"

"Yes, to-morrow afternoon. I'm a little bit up-set — after all that's happened to-day — to attempt to fix anything up with you just now. But —"

Jack's face went white. The breath left his lungs.

"Fix anything up with me!" he whispered. "You don't mean that you'll —"

"I don't give a damn about your measly little pasture mud-patch, but a man ballasted with six growing boys and a faithful woman who'll take five thousand dollars and put it into paying up debts that a bankruptcy court says haven't got to be paid, is wasting his life in a country printing office.

I only wish to God I had a dozen such chaps in some of my companies. I can use 'em right this minute — and pay 'em five thousand a year for their — their — unimpeachable honesty. I've only heard of one other case like this: it was an Illinois country storekeeper who walked several miles through the rain to return some change on which he'd made a mistake. I believe some folks made him President of the country through quite a trying spell. The world is starving for that kind of man. You come back to-morrow, young man. I'm going to make you a proposition."

"But Mr. Ezekial," Jack began after his first emotions had passed, "the money in the ochre bed—"

"To hell with the small change in that ochre bed! I'll pay you three thousand dollars a year, commencing next Monday morning, to go to New York, take a place in a certain office, and leaven a bunch of crooks who think they're smart enough to take away my eyeteeth without Old Zeke knowing. That is, providing what you have told me to-night stands investigation!"

"Mr. Ezekial, I —"

"You take my advice and go home and sleep from now until to-morrow afternoon. Have your wife soak your feet in mustard water and put you to bed with a dose of castor oil, goose grease on your chest and an old stocking 'round your neck. Come and see me around toward four o'clock. I've got a place for a chap like yourself, and in due time you'll understand why. Now —"

A soft tapping at the closed door interrupted him. The plain-faced, sweet-tempered, democratic daughter Martha looked in.

"Is Mrs. Purse's husband here?" she asked.

"We were passing through the hall and we thought we heard his voice."

"Yes," roared old Zeke impatiently, "and if Mrs. Purse is out there, tell her to come in. I want to see the wife of a man in debt five thousand dollars' worth who'd spend her legacy to get him out!"

Mary came in wonderingly and caught sight of Jack's bedraggled appearance and haggard face.

"What — has — happened?" she demanded, frightened.

"I've just made your man an offer to go to work for me in a place where I can count on his adamant honesty. Would you go with him and live in New York?"

"I'd live anywhere that means Jack's success —"

Old Zeke was suddenly softened.

"You are a good girl," he said. "Take your husband home, Mrs. Purse. He's ill. Get him on his feet again and then send him around to see me. We'll fix this thing up so he doesn't need to worry over his future. I know what six growing boys can do to a man to keep him hustling, loyal, on the straight track!"

"Mr. Ezekial," began Jack, "I don't know how to —"

"You're a sick man, young fellow. *Go home!*"

Jack suffered himself to be aided down the stairs. The servant helped tuck him into the buggy behind Monday-Washing. Old Zeke and his daughter waved them good-by from the steps and Timothy Bailey, who had been waiting for just such a cataclysmic proceeding from a distant corner, suddenly thrashed his old white horse into fury and tore for the distant village to spread the epochal news.

Then the Purses drove home.

"Mary," choked the husband, "light's breaking at last! He made me an offer of *three thousand dollars* a year to go to New York and work for him."

"How much?" demanded Mary in a whisper.

"Three — thousand — dollars!"

"Jack! That's seventy-five dollars every week."

"What'll we ever do with so much money?"

"Raise Tom to be a minister," declared Jack a little hysterically. "If he ever shows a leaning for newspaper work I'll flay him alive."

They splashed along through the slough of mud and snow with the drizzle beating in their faces.

"I guess you're responsible for it, as usual," Jack declared. "It was you that started out to see him —"

"I'm a — miserable — cheat," she choked. "I started out to see him. But when I got there, I guess my courage failed me. Oh, Jack, I'm only a woman, and I didn't — I didn't — really know how men looked on such things. I made an excuse to see Martha on Ladies' Aid business instead." And she began sobbing.

A wonderful tenderness surged up in his heart toward her.

"I think just as much of you as if you had," he declared thickly. "After all, it's worked out all right. Think what lies ahead of us, Mary, — New York, a princely salary, working for E. E. Ezekial, Mary!"

"Do you know why he laid so much stress on honesty, — Why he was so interested in you to-night especially, Jack?"

"No."

"I guess it's just one of those coincidences in life that are bound to happen to the most unfortunate

of us by the law of averages. Intuition tells me he's going to look you up to see if what you've told him is true, and then he's going to put you in the place where he thought his own son was 'safe' enough to occupy."

"His son? What about his son?"

"Did he say anything about any sorrow that'd come to him to-day?"

"No!"

"Jack, young Teddy Ezekial has just taken a lot of his father's money entrusted to him and spent it on Mibb Henderson — something to do with her singing!"

Up the road ahead came a gleam of mellow light. They were approaching home.

CHAPTER XI

LIFE IS A MIXTURE OF SMILES AND TEARS INDEED AND HAVING SMILED WITH OUR STORY FOLK AT SUNDRY SEASONS IN THIS STORY, WE ARE CALLED UPON NOW TO ENTER ON A QUIET SOLEMN TIME AND SHED A TEAR FOR A CHASTISEMENT OF THE ALMIGHTY

THE next morning before seven o'clock, Tommy Purse brought a note into town and up to Sam's house. It was from Mary.

"Boys," said Sam at the office a half hour later, — "Jack Purse has the grip. And that isn't all, — when he recovers he's going to leave us! Mary sent word this morning that as soon as he gets better he's going to work for old man Ezekial — in New York!"

Great was the consternation in our back room for the rest of that day.

Along toward three o'clock that afternoon our front door opened to admit — royalty. None other than old E. E. Ezekial stood there — the first time he had ever been in the *Telegraph* office since he had bought his summer place in Paris a decade before.

"I want a half-hour's talk with Mr. Hod," he announced. His features were careworn and his eyes tired. The sorrow of disappointment in his son was eating far more deeply into his tough old heart than many of us knew. "It's about young Purse. I understand he's been working here."

Sam led the way into his private office and closed the door. They were closeted for an hour and when the door was opened the little room was foul with stale cigar smoke. Old Man Ezekial went out.

"Old Zeke just gave me an earful of news, Bill," said Sam. "But I don't know whether it's a square deal to him to publish it or not. You know his boy Ferdinand got mixed up with Mibb Truman just after Herb disappeared, and she came back to try to raise some cash?"

"Yes."

"He followed her to New York and she's been carrying on with him more or less ever since. Anyhow, he's fallen for her. He took a lot of his dad's money and backed her on the stage. And now she's left him — with success coming to her — and gone on her own."

"But what's become of Mibb's mother?"

"I don't know. Nobody does. After Mibb got her divorce for Herb's desertion, she dropped out of sight. You'd probably find her in some obscure little place where she isn't known, running a boarding house."

"And telling her troubles to anyone who'll listen."

"Yes," Sam confirmed.

And he lighted his pipe philosophically.

The days went by. Mike Garrity ascended into the seat of the mighty, meaning the foremanship of our back office. He was a big-bodied, white-eyed-browed Irishman who never wore a printer's apron and always gave the impression that he was only holding the job down for a few minutes during somebody's absence. But he did get the work out of the help. Getting to press on time was his specialty.

There were many cuss-words; some tears. But he put system in our office and brought praise from our advertisers.

The days went by, indeed — seven of them.

Then the horse-faced servant from Preston Hill came in one afternoon and wanted to know if we had heard anything about John Purse's condition. Mr. Ezekial was returning to New York on the following day and he couldn't hold the place he had for Jack open indefinitely.

"We haven't heard anything beyond what there's been in the paper," Sam replied. "But for the sake of Jack's future I'll take a run out this evening and try and get something definite for Mr. Ezekial. It would be hard luck if Jack lost this opportunity through prolonged illness."

Sam drove out to the Purse place in one of Uncle Joe Fodder's livery rigs. At half-past eleven at night I was awakened by the ominous ringing of my own doorbell. Sam stood out in the frosty moonlight.

"Bill," he said, "— oh, God, Bill! — Jack's grip has gone into pneumonia, and he's taken a turn for the worse! Bill, you better get in and come back with me. Because — Jack isn't expected — to live — until morning!"

We spoke not a word as we drove those six miles through the crystalwhite winter country. I sat for the entire distance badly cramped by an oxygen tank which Sam had procured from the Metropolitan Drug Store. Far across the crusted winter fields where swept gusts of nipping air, I saw ruddy lights at last. Every room in the Purse house appeared lighted.

We met Doctor Johnson at the threshold of the

room off the kitchen, — the little side bedroom that for years had been Mary's mother's.

"You've brought the tank?" he demanded.

"Yes," said Sam huskily.

"I'm afraid it's useless. Mary waited too long. She depended too much on home remedies, thinking it was only a bad cold that he had."

"Where is Mary?"

"In there — with him."

"Can we go in?"

"Yes."

Mary was sitting on the edge of the bed holding Jack's hand. She raised her face blankly as we entered. The situation was too sinister, too intense, for such trifles as recognition. She looked at us and then turned her gaze back down on Jack's sleeping face. But in that instant we saw that Mary Purse was old. Her face was sunken. Her eyes were hollow. Her hair was sprinkled with gray.

Sam walked the floor ceaselessly, up and down the farmhouse dining room, carrying and comforting a little boy who was persistent in whimpering and breaking the silence of that house because he could not have his mother. I sat in the armchair and tried to comfort young Tom, age eleven, who was old enough to realize much that was taking place. But it was all a bungled job at best. The other boys were asleep, never knowing, alas, the meaning of the long watches of that night.

Along toward four o'clock, under the influence of the oxygen, though still struggling with his breathing, Jack rallied, came to consciousness and opened his eyes.

His gaze met the face of his wife.

Her features and the faces of those about his bed seemed to tell him the worst.

"Perhaps — I wouldn't have made good — at Mr. Ezekial's office, after all," he whispered weakly so that Mary had to bend down to catch the words. "Never mind! Some — other — time! Oh, Mary! You were a better wife than I was a husband. You — will — be — a better — mother than I was father. I'll try again — some other time!"

There was a gentle pressure of his hand.

Some — other — time!

Mary put her free hand suddenly to her eyes. Otherwise there was no sound, no motion, in that room.

And Jack Purse went home.

During the thirty-seven years in which we have been publishing a newspaper, it follows that we have written many, many obituaries. But no obituary has ever meant to us exactly what Jack Purse's did, for without wishing to pose as heartless or unduly calloused we may set it down that the hundreds of others have been the material with which we did business. But Jack Purse's obituary was the summary and the heart-story of a man's life bringing death home to us, — stark and sinister and grim and deadly. Sam would suffer no one else to attempt that column story. He also wrote an article for the editorial column. And both were masterpieces because he forgot he was writing for print, forgot the thing called literary effect, forgot technique and paragraphing and punctuation and style and composed from his soul the simple little record of the passing of a friend.

The obituary and the editorial caused much

comment in the community. Every one knew the Purses and how Jack's fortunes were about to change just as he was "taken." Every one knew also the predicament in which Mary had been left. It happened that the sewing circle of Calvary Church met the day between the death and the funeral and the comment of its membership is again of note:

Mrs. Artemus Howard voiced the universal sentiment. She said:

"I don't mind the passing of Mr. Purse himself. He's out of his troubles. But think of Mary—nice little woman that she is—left with all those little children! What will she ever do?"

"And after all the trouble she had about ten years ago with her own folks!" declared Mrs. Taylor, "—not to mention the struggles she has been through since in a financial way and havin' so many babies and all. I wish the Lord would give me the running of this universe for just five minutes. I'd change some things! It'd do your soul good to watch me!"

"I heard he was just going to work for old man Ezekial at some fishy-soundin' sum of money," declared Mrs. Dexter Merritt. "He'd went up with a nerve o' brass that I wish my Dexter could muster, and he'd got Mr. Ezekial to do somethin' handsome for him. And right away he's taken! Right when the light was shinin' through on all the darkness of his struggles and troubles, he was taken! What a mystery, what a mystery! And a mess! There simply ain't no consistency to the world nohow."

Mrs. Fred Babcock called attention to the fact that Jack carried no life insurance although Fred had been up to see the Purses scores of times and Jack was always just going to do it but never felt

he could quite afford it, and now look at the fix his wife is in. And she went on to say that was always the way it was: men without chick or children and only some frumpy old woman to look after, always carried thousands, and them as had helpless wives and little mouths depending on 'em thought they could get by somehow and take chances with death that always bested 'em!

Mrs. Walter Gaylord said the village ought to take up a collection to help Mary out and Miss Malinda Sparrow said she doubted if Mary would accept it if the village should. She was very proud, was Mary. To which Judge Farmer's wife said "beggars shouldn't be choosers", which she was immediately sorry for, meaning no unkindness but being simply unfortunate in her choice of an axiom appropriate for the circumstances.

Mrs. Blake Whipple, a lady of parts and known of old to have an eye for business, for once had no comment to make in a commercial capacity. She merely remarked that Blake was pretty well screwed up to such situations and usually they didn't upset him. But when he came back from the Purse place with all those little children playing around almost as usual and never knowing their loss that was laid out in the chilly front room, he said damn his business anyhow, and if it wasn't for the dead folks havin' to be took care of and some one simply havin' to do it, he'd get out of it so quick you'd never see him and his hearse go; you'd just simply miss 'em.

But Jack Purse was gone — gone! Gone just when his fortunes showed promise of change.

WE do not understand, being ordinary thick-skulled males, how Mary Purse survived that blow.

She must have gone through hell the first week following the placing of Jack's body in the vault for burial in the spring. Our wives went out there to console her and brought back stories of her cheerfulness, her poise, the wonderful tenderness she exhibited toward her fatherless boys. And then, — then came an episode with which it is fitting to close this portion of our narrative and move on out of scenes of struggle and grief and heartache into those of success and glory and great peace. About seven days after the funeral, Mary Purse came into our office.

It was Saturday afternoon. The paper had been run off but the boys and girls had not been paid off or the shafting stopped whirring in the basement. Crowds of farmers were milling up and down Main Street, patronizing our barber shops, occasional individuals dropping in now and then to insert classified ads or pay their subscriptions. Sam Hod looked up from the exchange he was reading and there, in the private-office doorway between our two desks, stood Mary.

She was in mourning but not morbidly so. Her face was drawn, her hair was grayer than ever. She was not thirty-five, yet somehow Mary Purse had mellowed. Grief and terrible trouble affects some folk that way. Others it makes mean and cynical and hateful toward their fellows and their God. But Mary was one of those whom the vicissitudes of life were mellowing and deepening, one of those whom it is good to have around because of what they have suffered.

"Mary!" cried Sam, springing up and placing a chair for her. "You! I'm so glad to see you again, Mary! We didn't know whether coming out to try

to console you would make things better or worse. We haven't quite gotten over Jack's passing yet ourselves."

She took the chair. She smiled a wonderful smile.

"You shouldn't have hesitated to come, Mr. Hod. But that is in the past. I have come to you because I want something."

"Yes, Mary. What can we do for you?"

"Mr. Hod, I'm wondering if you'd do something for me so very hard and that sounds so impertinent for me to ask that I'm almost ill with worry that you might refuse."

"Anything on earth I can do for you, I promise that I will, Mary."

She waited a moment before the request came out.

"Mr. Hod," she said fearfully, faintly, but steadily, "I want — can I have — my old place — back — in your office?"

Sam looked at her blankly.

"You want *what*?"

"I want my old job back, in your office. Setting type in a printing office is all that I know how to do. And I must do something. All during this week I have been turning it over and over in my heart. That first night after the funeral I got into bed alone. I could not stand it alone. I called to my boys and they got into bed with me. The little ones thought it was sport. The older boys snuggled up close beside me. Yes, we did! — six of us in one bed. And they quieted down after a time and fell asleep. I only was left awake in the awful, awful dark.

"And there in the bed, with the bodies of my boys around me, and their little hearts beating close to mine, I laid in the silence and fought it out with myself. I must not complain. I must not lose

heart nor faith. I must take up the battle of life where Jack laid it down and carry it on. I am not the first woman who has lost a husband. I must not think of my sorrow. I must bury that in my heart and my life. Ahead of me lies the work of raising those boys of mine to be good men. And when I have done that, I am ready and willing to lay down my heartache and follow Jack. That is for the far, far future. Life for me now must be too practical to think of that."

"You want to go to work — here?"

"Yes. I am going to work — here if you'll let me. I am going on! God helping me, I will not fail my little boys!"

"And you think you can do it by working here, Mary!"

"I thought some of taking Tom out of school. The next moment it seemed ridiculous. Just because my life has ended in failure is no reason why I should do anything to make his little life a failure, also. So I'm going to keep him in school and all the other boys as fast as they become old enough. I've got the cow, the little black mare and the place; I guess I can manage somehow — if you only give me back my work. Old Mrs. Morrow will live with us and look after the youngsters while I'm here in the village typesetting each day. If you can give me the chance to earn nine or ten dollars a week, it will keep us in clothes and pay the taxes and doctor's bills that are bound to come. Then as each boy gets through college, I count on him turning around and helping the next younger brother under him."

"What!" we both cried. "You're going to try to put those six boys through college — alone?"

"Yes, I'm going to try. Once I wanted to go to

college. Once I wanted to amount to something in the world. But things occurred that prevented me. Somehow the chance never seemed to work around. I had to leave home suddenly and go to work — here. Then I got married and the babies came. After that there was no hope. And I faced it. But my boys — every one of them! — are going through college if it kills me! I want Tom to go through theological school and turn out a preacher. I guess that every mother wishes that one of her boys would turn out a preacher. But whatever happens, I shall do my best and leave the rest to God. Mr. Hod, I want that old place of mine very, very much. I'll work my fingers to the bone if you'll only give me the chance. Can I have it?"

"Yes, Mary," replied Sam quietly, — the preface to an emotional explosion, "You can have it. Come in Monday morning and take your old job. The wages will be sixteen dollars a week and you can keep it till you're a hundred!"

When she had gone I said to Sam :

"But she can't set anything but straight matter, Sam! And we don't set any more straight matter by hand. We dumped all our eight point when we installed the machines."

"Then, by gad, we'll buy some!" roared Sam Hod. "For so long as I own a controlling interest in this Biannual Bedquilt which the town calls a newspaper, that woman shall have a job here as long as there's one exclamation point left outside the hell-box! And if any bat-eared slob with a kink in his neck ever breathes that we bought type especially for her to stick, there'll be a bunch of journalistic fatheads taken suddenly dead around here that we won't show

enough post-mortem respect to haul out by the legs!"

"But sixteen dollars a week, Sam!"

"Yes, sixteen dollars a week! And what about sixteen dollars a week? Suppose Jesus Christ walked into my office this afternoon and sat down opposite the exchange table. Suppose He said to me, 'Sam Hod, will you manage somehow to rake together sixteen measly dollars every Saturday to loan to Me so that I can help a poor, perplexed, bewildered mother raise six freckled-faced, hell-raising, button-busting kids?' I'd just naturally scrape that money together somehow, wouldn't I? — for His sake? Well, I don't mind sayin' that seven minutes ago, as I sat in that chair and Mary Purse declared her intention o' slavin' her life out to put them half-dozen young wild-cats through school — *I Saw Jesus Christ in that woman's face!* And I'd a damned sight rather lay a few mouldy treasures for myself in heaven by givin' Mary Purse sixteen dollars of unnecessary money every Saturday afternoon than give double that amount to some of the churches of this town. I'd rather do it than help pay minister's grocery bills or send missionaries to teach the slant-eyed Japs how to bungle the Beatitudes or that Moses was a Hebrew law-maker and not a Canal Street manufacturer of boys' pants!"

Sam was exploding with a vengeance and when in that condition, had a certain facility with language.

He went into the back room and addressed the force.

"Boys," he announced, "Mary Purse — Jack's wife — is coming back to work for us. She commences Monday morning."

Mike Garrity straightened up from his stone.

"*What?*" he demanded.

"I said Jack Purse's widow, who once graced this hole with her sweet presence, is coming back to pick up her stick and show us how to set a few locals so I don't dread the sickenin' ring of a telephone bell every night after supper!"

Mike said an unholy sentence and threw down his quoin-key.

"Then, by gad, I'm about ready to quit! After all the pie-eyed freaks I've had wished on to me since I come into this place to make over into printers, to have an old woman given a place as an object of charity — !"

He got no further. Only once in my life have I known Sam Hod to see red. He was upon Mike with an oath and had him by the throat.

"Take it back! — you foul-mouthed, bleary-eyed, tobacco-spittin' harp! Act crazy with joy that she's comin' and treat her like a lady, or by the eternal Jehoshaphat I'll bust you in the jaw, hammer you against the wall, grind your ugly mug in the gravel and stamp on your stomach! Now then, what is there about this newcomer's position here that you don't understand? Speak it out now and speak it out loud. Because if you open your elongated head about it after she gets here, it's going to take more money than Solomon spent on his immortal meeting house to pay for the masses said over your smoulderin' soul!"

But Mike had nothing to say, absolutely nothing. When Sam untangled his fingers, the Irishman's face was pasty. Deprived of Sam's support, he caught himself as he was sliding onto his knees.

The office — individually and otherwise — drew a long breath. They continued their washing up with

strange smiles playing upon their faces. From time to time after Sam had returned to the front office they cast furtive glances at the suddenly cowed foreman.

Considering Mike's little idiosyncrasies of self-aggrandizement since he had taken Jack's position and his frequent loud-mouthed assertions of contempt and independence of the boss, Sam's emotional explosion had rather smashed Mike's militarism.

On the whole a pleasant time had been had by all.

CHAPTER XII

IN WHICH WE ACKNOWLEDGE THE VISIT OF THE TRUMAN WOMAN, NÉE HENDERSON, ON THE SECOND OF THREE VISITS WHICH SHE PAYS TO THE HEROINE OF OUR NARRATIVE.

MANY are the elderly people all over the land who recollect very well when the Great Zola captured the music-lovers of the country, half a generation ago, and carried the nation by storm. She filled theatres, auditoriums and music halls from old Cape Cod to the Golden Gate and then appeared to have dropped out of sight as completely as though old mother Earth had opened and engulfed her forever.

The Great Zola indeed!

Where she got the name none of us ever heard or knew. As Uncle Joe Fodder put it: "Fame usually consists o' long hair, longer nerve and a few idle letters of the alphabet, anyhow, compressed into a reasonable amount o' newspaper advertisin'." And in Mibb Truman's case it did look indeed as though Uncle Joe were correct. For Mibb called herself "The Great Zola" and had a backer and a press agent. Her wonderful voice, given her from birth, trained for a few years and then exhibited before "the best people" did for her all that may have been expected. Mibb "arrived" at last, although the angels may have sighed at times over the methods by which Mabel advanced her career and reached her hilltop.

When poor young Ferdie Ezekial blew out his

brains in an Atlantic City hotel some time after, his family gave it out that he had been a victim of melancholia since boyhood. But some of the plain-spoken folks of our town made no bones of saying that he did it because after backing Mibb Truman and buzzing about her as a moth buzzes about a flame for a year and a day, until she had achieved a tuppence worth of fame in some quarters on her talent and his money, the woman turned him down for a Quick Rich Johnnie from the West who subsequently went financially insolvent, if not mentally and morally so, endeavoring to keep up with Mibb's ramifications. Then we next heard of her having met Dick Robinson, the boy who had proposed to her once in the long ago on the way home from singing school and been laughed at, and gone away to the city and and remained a bachelor and made several millions of dollars as vice-president of some big oil company. These things leak back to a little New England town. Because of her fame, perhaps, Dick had picked up with her again, and Judge Farmer who spent much of his time now in New York, declared he had met them in Delmonico's together on several occasions.

But the mills of the gods grind slowly. One cannot sow the wind without reaping the whirlwind.

And while Mibb Henderson was journeying to and fro in the land and going up and down in it singing wonderful songs at hundreds of dollars a night and spending on baubles what would have kept Mary Purse and her growing family in the necessities of life for a year, this same Mary Purse was back at her place in our office day after day before a typecase, now setting locals when the machines were busy and we needed extra matter, now helping with twelve point

in the Modern Bargain store ads, assisting with the mailing or reading proof, earning her sixteen dollars every week which was quickly spent as in days of old, for the sustenance of others beside herself. There were times when it did seem as though Mibb's philosophy had been soundest after all.

So one grand bird wore grand plumage and flew high, and another in softer, grayer feathers remained close to earth and hunted food for hungry little mouths, and the years began to go onward faster and faster, and the Purse boys took to bursting buttons and ripping seams more than ever and increasing their stature overnight, after the manner of boys since Adam became the father of young.

Mary Purse was sitting in a creaking rocker in the twilight of a restful Sunday afternoon when the muffled throbbing of an automobile sounded out front, accompanied by the slam of a door. Automobiles were curiosities in those days, rarely stopping before the Purse place. Mary moved across to the window and peered out through the ladders of geraniums.

A high newfangled car stood in the road. On its forward seat was a man in livery. The sinking sun glinted on its polished surfaces but Mary paid but brief attention to the vehicle. A woman was coming into the yard and the woman was Mibb.

She came leisurely up the path, carrying a sailor hat in her hand and looking interestedly about her. Once she stopped, turned and gazed over the hills and the valleys far away, beautiful in the peaceful hush of the mellow sunset.

Mary moved across the room to the door. After all she was Mibb Henderson of the old days, her girlhood friend.

"Hello, Mary!" greeted Mibb, standing on the doorstone fringed with the plantain leaves.

"How do you do, Mabel," responded Mary. "Won't you come in?"

"For a few minutes perhaps," the other answered. "I just ran out to see how things were going and to talk over old times with you. I don't get a chance to look Paris over very closely nowadays. All our set seems to have grown up or died or moved away, and all the faces you see on the streets nowadays are strange. I'm a busy woman nowadays, Mary."

"So I understand, Mabel. We hear of you once in a while back here. You have made a wonderful success of your voice; Judge Farmer came back from New York last month and said he went to hear you. It must be a great source of satisfaction to you."

"Oh that's nothing," declared Mibb contemptuously. "I always said I could look out for myself, didn't I? You could have done something similar if you hadn't been so sickishly sentimental. After all, in this life, we have to look out for ourselves. If we don't nobody else will, that's sure!" She paused on the step. "My heaven's, who's that boy?"

"That's my eldest boy, Tom. He's fifteen this coming summer, although the neighbors say he looks eighteen or twenty."

The boy had appeared with a vault over the stone wall followed by a black spaniel dog. He went on through the yard to the barn. Mabel looked after him blankly. Then she flushed. For it must have come to her in that moment how many years had passed since she had poked her very patrician finger in Thomas Joshua's infantile torso as old ladies poke their fingers into prospective pot-roasts at the

butcher's. Yes indeed, it must have come to Mibb that she was getting on. And it must have hurt. For Mibb was one of those worthy females who hadn't had a birthday in the last dozen years. She said quickly: "And may I come in and see your old house? You know I haven't been out here to go inside since I was a little girl and father's buggy wheel came off, a little way down the road, spilling mother and me out on the ground in the cold slush."

"Certainly you may come in, Mabel. Although the house doesn't look at its best. The boys are always leaving something around. Richard must put his baseball things away; I keep telling him that I'll burn them up if he persists in dropping them when he's done with them, but of course I wouldn't. A boy's a boy."

Madame Zola entered the little west sitting room, — the room with the rag carpet on the floor that was once Jack's mother's, with one or two high-backed old horsehair rockers with tidies; the marble-topped center table; the whatnot in the corner; the high old secretary and the enlarged picture of Jack in crayon over the mantel. It was a homely, quiet, comfortable old room — a typical room for a woman with a family of growing boys being raised in the country — the windows massed with geraniums, petunias, inch-plant and heliotrope. Madame Zola took one of the heavy horsehair rockers and ran her eye over the things in the room depreciatingly.

"I'm glad you came," volunteered Mary politely. "I get so few visitors way out here these days — with my work in the office keeping me so busy during the week. Mrs. Morrow is over to the Browns' this afternoon —"

"Lord sake! Then why do you live way out here?"

Why not move into the village where there's something going on?"

"It's home," replied Mary weakly.

Mibb glanced the room over again. She glanced Mary over also, — from the worn frayed shoes on her weary feet to the dark hair streaked with gray, done hard and flat upon her head. Truly it was difficult to realize that these two women were almost of an age.

"Mary," she said finally, "it's too bad!"

"What's 'too bad', Mabel?"

"The way you've ruined your life. We started out equally, Mary. You remember what I told you soon after you and Jack were married. But you wouldn't take my warning. You were dead set on this love business. You said the hard work didn't matter. And look what it's got you at last, Mary. Nothing but this." And again her eyes glanced over the room.

"It's — home, Mabel," said Mary again.

"Which isn't saying much, Mary. I feel sorry for you, Mary. Indeed I do! Oh, I know that you think I'm a snob and all that. But I do feel sorry for you, Mary. I'm sincere in saying it. You've worked hard all your life. You never went anywhere nor had any good times. You're spending the best years of your life in that pokey old printing office now, living out here in a lonesome old place in the country, struggling to raise six boys! It must be awful. If there's anything I could do for you for old time's sake, I'd do it in a minute. That's really the true reason why I came out here this afternoon. I heard in the village how you were living and — I came out to see if I couldn't help you — money or something."

"You can't," replied Mary softly, a trifle hoarsely. "I said this was home. I mean it, Mabel. You can't appreciate what that means. You never had a home, not a real home. Jack and I bought this place when we were young and life was all sort of full of hope and promise; again you don't know what that means, Mabel —"

"I was too wise," cut in Mabel. "Catch me tying myself up to a man and having kids that twist you out of shape and take away your good looks and make you dowdy and frumpish and tubby; but we've been all over that before."

"— so you cannot appreciate the associations," went on Mary. "On the walls here, Mabel, are scars of little household accidents the boys have made growing up, the barks of their toys and the prints of their grimy little fingers on the wall paper to indicate the passing years. Jack died there in the east room. His casket was carried out this door. Every piece of furniture is dear to me, Mabel. Every room and door and window and corner holds associations and sometimes, Mabel — sometimes in the dark — there's little ghosts play around through these rooms, Mabel —"

"For Gawd's sake, quit, Mary. You talk spookish; it's enough to get on a party's nerves. I should think you'd go crazy living out here in this fashion with no man around to protect you."

"They're dear to me, these things, these associations are; they've been my life, Mabel. You can't live in one house a long time without every stick and stone and nail in it bein' sort of like your flesh and blood."

"I'm thankful I haven't got any associations like those, Mary. There's nothing like that to make me

miserable on dark and rainy days. I've always had a good time and kept my eye on the future. And if you'd done the same I don't know as you'd been living through this hell of worry and work now."

"It isn't hell!" whispered Mary. "It's wicked to call it that! It's — it's — heaven, Mabel. It's the nearest thing to earthly heaven I know. I love — it — so!"

"You always were sort of sickishly sentimental; I say it again. I told you so the day after I got back from my own wedding trip. My way was best, Mary. After all is said and done you can't deny I've made a success of my life. Never mind what people say — all the same I know that I have. I've had a good time all along; I've enjoyed life; I've been to Europe seven times, Mary. I've seen the world and life. Right now I'm free to come and go; I get a salary in five figures a year for my concert work. I have my automobile and my apartments in the city —"

"And what else, Mabel?"

"What else? What else is there to have? What do you mean?"

"You've got all that as you say. But what else. You've got no one to care about you; no one to love you —"

"Haven't I, though? Don't be too sure about that, Mary."

"You've no children or nothing?"

"No, I haven't got any kids, but good Lord why do you persist in placing such a lot of emphasis on kids? Anybody'd think that kids were the only concern a woman could have in the world?"

"According to the way I look at things, they are, Mabel."

"Well, I place a different value on things. For instance, there's Dick Robinson —"

"Yes, but what's he to you, Mibb? Merely a rich man. It isn't like sons or daughters of your own who care for you because of what you've done for them."

"Then it might interest you to know that I expect to marry him — Dick Robinson — in the not too distant future."

"Marry him!"

"Yes, marry him! And why shouldn't I? Haven't I been through enough so I deserve the haven of a good husband's love at last? I'll never have any brats, it's true. But again I say, that to me brats never stood for nothing but pain and worry and care. No, sir; folks don't know it yet and I don't intend they should. But if things work around all right — and I rather calculate that if I have anything to say about them they will — I'm going to marry Dick Robinson next year and come into my share of his money —"

"Always money, money, money! You haven't changed a great lot, have you, Mabel?"

"I said I'd take my chances with money and I have. I haven't fared so badly. Can you say the same, Mary Wood?"

"I'm — satisfied," breathed Mary at last.

"But you can't make me believe it, Mary. No sensible, high-strung, sensitive woman could possibly be satisfied with this, not when they've slaved like you've slaved."

"I'm — satisfied," breathed Mary again. "I can't understand you, Mabel. I never could. Somehow it seems at times as if you ain't really truly woman."

"Don't lose any sleep over me, Mary. I'm capable of taking care of myself. I think I've proved it. I'm going to prove it some more —"

"I hate to say it, Mabel; you're an old girlhood friend of mine, almost the only one that's left out of the old crowd. But you're — you're — selfish, Mabel. You've always been selfish —"

"We won't indulge in personalities, Mary. I came out here in the best spirit possible to see if there was anything I could do for you."

"There isn't, Mabel. Not anything. I'm not ungrateful. I've lived my life in my own way and after my own standards. If I was to go back and live it over there isn't hardly a day or an hour of it that I'd live differently."

"Some folks do have such queer ideas," observed Mabel, fixing her hair in the back.

"Then you got a divorce, did you, from Herbert?"

"Herbert? Oh, yes, you mean the elephantine person of the male sex with whom I once committed a rash girlish act. Certainly I got a divorce from him, while I was out in California in 'ninety-four."

"And you never heard what became of him?"

"No, why should I? What is he to me?"

"He was your husband, Mabel."

Mabel laughed, a contemptuous laugh.

"Heavens, but you are old-fashioned! In my set, a woman who hasn't had two or three husbands simply isn't in the swim, at all."

"I wouldn't care much for those in your set, Mabel, I'm afraid."

"Nor they for you, either. Oh, for heaven's sake, can't you and I come together without fighting over this disgusting subject of domesticity? You make

me mad! What's your life, anyway? Tell me that!"

"My life," answered Mary quietly, "is working to raise six live-wire boys to be good men. When that is done, my life-work is completed. That's been my 'career' — at least up to the present and I can't change it now. There's been frightfully cruel moments in it. But there's been frightfully dear and precious moments too. After all, keeping a home and raising children is a woman's work in the world, and if she isn't content to accept it, she hasn't any business being a woman. I can't for the life of me see why — when God made woman for that — there should be so much fault-finding and discontent and dissatisfaction among them and wanting to be something else. Somehow the women folks nowadays think it's a curse on a woman that she is a woman and they're trying their best to be men. But somehow I've observed, Mabel, that there's nothing but unhappiness and heart-hunger beneath it all, and a fault-finding with the men folks, society and God — everybody and everything but themselves — with selfishness at the bottom of it and a cowardly shrinking from some of the noble duties of life just because they want a pleasant time and good looks and nonsense. I've been through the experience of motherhood six times, Mabel. And I've buried a husband. But along with it all there's come a satisfaction and a peace, a resignation if you want to call it that, Mabel, that's ample to repay it all. I've tried not to shirk; I've tried to do my duty and am as happy as I know how to be, while doing it. And I'm not galivanting around, looking for happiness through dollars or marrying rich men or fearful of losing my good looks and all such nonsense. I'm not looking

for happiness, because I've got it, Mabel. I've got a happiness now that nothing in life can take away. Maybe I haven't seen Europe seven times; probably I'll never see Europe or any other place but Paris, Vermont. But I've seen other things that you've never seen and it isn't given you to see, Mabel, and it's plenty. Don't waste any pity on me, Mabel. Pity yourself. You're a lonely woman; you're the lonely one, not me. I can read it in your face, Mabel. And may the kind Father have mercy on you. You need it, Mabel, indeed. You need it but you don't know it."

"This is all one gets for trying to be neighborly and helpful for old time's sake," Mabel replied wrathfully. "Well, as we both seem to be satisfied with our lots, Mary, I might as well call my visit at an end and go."

She arose stiffly and she did go. But as she rolled back to town she knew deep in her heart that Mary Wood had spoken the truth.

"My Gawd!" she cried suddenly and miserably, "I'd give all the Robinson millions I'm coming into next year just to have the peace that's on Mary Purse's face!"

She meant what she said though there was no one to hear.

CHAPTER XIII

THE MILLS OF THE GODS KEEP GRINDING, GRINDING, GRINDING, AND FIVE COUNTRY FOLK JOURNEY TO THE CITY TO LOOK UPON ITS TINSEL FOR A MOMENT.

THERE were two times in those years when she was raising her youngsters that Mary Purse went away from home on a vacation. The first was the two weeks that she spent with an aunt of Jack's up in North Sidney, taking the boys on a never-to-be-forgotten visit. The second was the time that she went with Sam Hod and myself and our wives down to Boston to the famous Fair in the old Mechanics' Hall.

This tired scribe has forgotten now exactly how it was that we happened to go and take Mary. I think she had broken down temporarily after Fred had the scarlet fever and for a week or so, just after Tom left for college, and fearing for her health, I think we utilized our railroad passes — freely issued to newspapermen in those halcyon days of country journalism — and made Mary the fifth of our party.

But if we of the office have forgotten the little details of how Mary chanced to be with us, emphatically we have not forgotten what happened on that trip and the pathos of the girl who married Jack Purse for love—in one situation that came from that journey.

For we saw the Great Zola — the Truman woman, *née* Henderson — in all her glory.

It was Sam who found the notice in a newspaper as we lounged late one winter's afternoon in the lobby of the old Parker House.

"The famous contralto, the Great Zola!" he cried. "Sufferin' Moses, Bill, do you suppose that could be Mibb?"

"What about the famous contralto, the Great Zola?"

"She's singing here! She's giving a concert here to-night!"

We read the advertisement. We passed it to our women folk and to Mary. It was Mary who turned the page in a trifle of bewilderment and uncertainty, and we fancied a bit of wistfulness. It chanced then that she turned open the pages of the theatrical section. From the page a picture stared at us. There was no mistaking that picture. It was indeed Mibb — Mabel of our office. Beneath was the usual press-agent write-up of Mibb's wonderful talent.

"It sort of slops over," declared Sam disgustedly. "All the same, if she can sing now as she sang in the old days, she's certainly some warbler. Folks! Let's go to that concert."

Mary whitened a trifle. She bit a soft lip. Then a forced smile broke over her careworn countenance.

"Yes," she said, "let's go to that concert. Let's go and hear Mibb sing in public."

We went.

We secured five tickets from sidewalk brokers. I think we paid five dollars apiece for them. Sam made a grimace as he gave up the money.

Mary was careworn and a trifle shabby as of old, though not from preference, the good Lord knows in His heart. She had matured into mellow matron-

hood; the gray was beginning to be more and more noticeable now in her hair; her face was a trifle sallow; her hands were growing gnarled, alas, like her mother's. The five of us made somewhat of a shoddy appearance in that patrician Bostonese audience.

As we sat there, from the corner of an eye I saw Mary watching those Boston folks. Then, poor soul, I knew by the expression on her face that she was comparing herself with them and finding poor consolation in the comparison. She pulled at her sleeves, fixed her hair, arranged a frail little bit of ribbon at her throat. But it was all poor excuse at best for the lack of finery — real finery — which the starved woman heart of her craved. A feeling of sadness came over me and a sympathy for Mary in that moment such as I had not felt before, verily not even on that afternoon of Jack Purse's burial. As that evening went on that sympathy for her increased — increased in just that proportion that Mibb was beautiful where Mary was shabby and shoddy.

For Mibb was beautiful, at least from where our usher had seated us. Distance may have lent enchantment or it may have been Mibb's war-paint in her battle with life. Perhaps it was her purple and fine linen. Anyway when she finally came on to the platform Sam at my side emitted a low whistle.

"Oh, for Uncle Joe Fodder!" the editor declared. "I wonder what remark he would make to look upon Mibb Henderson now?"

Mibb had grown stouter. She also had mellowed, at least in her figure. In her black, low cut gown, high coiffure and diamond bespangled fingers, the "nine-o'clock girl" of our little town was not the nine-o'clock girl at all, but a gorgeous creature out-

matching Solomon in all his glory, providing that Solomon ever arrayed himself in black, low-cut gowns, high coiffures and slipped clusters of fire gems with reckless abandon on his fingers.

"She's took to painting and powdering," remarked Alice Hod in a hoarse whisper, "and her hair is dyed or I'm a carrot!"

"Well, she's no amateur at it," remarked her husband enthusiastically. "The days when she used to keep a little square of mirror in her P-case and primp herself between locals have certainly turned to her advantage." He said it in an extra-loud voice, for the great audience was applauding enthusiastically and Mibb was nodding and acknowledging their tribute just a wee bit indifferently. Something of her old contempt for her talent remained in her carriage in public. A tall, lean, lank young man, whom Sam declared resembled a string bean in a dress suit, hurried across stage, carrying an immense white handkerchief, spun the piano stool as though in a hurry to have it done and it was something to be ashamed of doing in public, seated himself and tinkled a few bars of piano music. And Mibb, poised rather languidly at the corner of the baby-grand piano with the raised cover, began to sing.

She sang that old song, "Stars of the Summer Night."

"Remember where we folks heard that song last?" Sam demanded.

"At the party up in Gold-piece Cabin," returned Alice. "Frank played it on his violin!" Then she dented one of her husband's ribs with her elbow. "But you keep quiet," she admonished. "We want to hear this music!"

I looked at Mary Purse. Her head was slightly on

one side. Her work-hardened hands were relaxed in her lap. Her eyes were fixed on Mibb hungrily. When Alice Hod leaned over and criticized something in Mibb's toilet, she merely nodded sadly. In that moment I was sorry that we had attended this entertainment and brought Mary. For Mibb's materialistic philosophy may have been faulty as an abstract problem in metaphysics, but it had brought her success, while Mary's had brought her seemingly but work and sorrow and red hands and a care-lined face and raiment that was only cheap serge and shoddy.

The audience applauded when Mibb finished, as audiences have had a habit of doing out of the ages eternal when the applause was for the social idol or artist of the moment and their work on the whole was passing fair. And Mibb sang the encore — the song is immaterial — and was applauded again, and the string bean came in for his portion of it; and then both had some more and Mibb swished off the platform and back on again and consulted with the string bean and the string bean nodded and began again and we had still more music.

The concert only lasted an hour. But toward the close of that hour, Mibb sang two songs that demonstrated only too plainly that it was not alone her voice which had brought her fame, but the discretion employed in her selections. For they had been chosen to answer the age-old yearning in the hearts of tired men and women, patrician or no, for the scenes and faces and heart-hopes of days that have gone with the long ago. She sang "Silver Threads Among the Gold" and for an encore followed it with that beautiful simple old ballad, "Home, Sweet Home."

A vast hush fell over the audience. Even a dreamy daze came over the features of the string bean at the piano, as Mibb sang it and his fingers followed her on the keys. Sam's chin sank lower and lower into his chest. There was no coughing, no rustling of programs. Mibb cast a spell over that throng and even the most sophisticated for the moment could not break away. And the spell was no less thrown over the hearts and minds of five ordinary country folk down in the front seats of that theater.

Mibb did not wait for applause to spoil the effect she had created. She passed quickly though equally quietly to "Home, Sweet Home."

Mary Purse put her handkerchief quickly to her lips. Then it went up to her eyes and she held it there.

Only two men in that audience fancied they knew why Mibb put such feeling into her last song.

Somehow we wished we were all out of that place and up in the familiar old streets of Paris, Vermont.

Was the applause deafening? It was!

They would not let Mibb go off that platform. They called for her again and again. And again and again she had to respond. A bouquet of flowers came down the left aisle, somewhere under the mass a human being carried along by legs. Another came down the right aisle. Wave after wave of approval swept down from the balconies and back again.

"And to think," said Sam hoarsely, "that *that* Queen of Sheba once worked in our printing office!"

Sam wanted to go back-stage and see Mibb and visit with her but Alice would not have it.

"Because, to me she'll always be the same old Mibb Henderson, never mind how high she flies. I

couldn't bring myself to rave over her and congratulate her as I suppose I ought."

But Mary said nothing. With the same wistful look ever on her face, she went with us out of that theater.

When we got back to the hotel she complained of a headache and went almost at once to her rooms. Alice, who had cause to go down the hotel corridor afterward, said the light was burning under Mary's adjacent door until well into the morning.

She came back to Paris with us and took up the burden of her life again before a grimy type case, earning the wherewithal to raise those boys which Jack had left her, in the dumb, hopeless, unsung heroism of plain people doing plain tasks because that is their destiny.

But as for Mibb, she went on, onward and upward, from Glory unto Glory.

Going home on the train I said to Sam :

"I feel that we should have gone back and made ourselves known to Mibb. There was something about the way she sang that 'Home, Sweet Home' that tells me she would have been glad to see us."

"See her? Of course I saw her," Sam answered. "I waited until Alice had gone to our room and then made an excuse I wanted a lunch, to go back and see her. And who do you suppose I found with her?"

"Who?" I demanded.

"Dick Robinson. You remember Dick whom she once turned down when he proposed to her back in Paris before she married Herb for his money?"

Certainly I remembered Dick.

"But you wouldn't know him," went on Sam. "I hardly knew him myself. He's changed, Dick has. He's grown hard and cynical and there are

creases in his face. He was waiting in her dressing room for her."

"In her dressing room!"

"Yes, and Mibb was disrobing almost in front of him as though it were the most commonplace thing in the world. It — sort of disgusted me; that's why I haven't said much about it. A pair of corsets was hanging over the back of the chair in which Dick was sitting dawdling his cane."

We were alone temporarily in the smoker. We rode for a few minutes in silence.

"Well?" I said.

"They wanted me to go out with them and have a feed and some drinks. I didn't go. Bill," said the editor suddenly, "do you suppose Mary Purse was envious of Mibb as the crowd was applauding last night and the bouquets coming down the aisles?"

"Mary's only human, like the rest of us," I answered. Then I said: "Let's see, Dick never married, did he?"

But Sam did not hear. He answered his own question:

"Strange," he remarked, "that it should be old Harve Henderson's daughter who'll get that gold-piece!"

We told Uncle Joe Fodder about it in the office the next day.

"Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord," was the only comment the old man made. Which was queer.

"Mibb told me she was starting on another grand continental tour in the spring," said Sam, as the train drew into Paris on that ride home.

CHAPTER XIV

AS THE MILLS OF THE GODS GRIND SLOWLY THERE COMES A SUDDEN OMINOUS BUMP IN THE MACHINERY AND THOSE WHO ARE LISTENING FEEL THAT SOMETHING HAS GONE WRONG SOMEWHERE OR A SUBSTANCE GONE BETWEEN THE STONES THAT HAS BEEN ANNIHILATED MERCILESSLY.

It is time to close the second portion of this story now, but before we write "Part the Third" at the top of a new sheet of foolscap, let us set down here one grim anecdote that stands out in jagged red and perhaps in the general scheme of things adds some poor measure of consolation.

We have never been able to get the exact details. We have only the strange little morsels of gossip which are bound to drift back to a little country town to be tossed to and fro over family teacups. And combining these with the story which Dick Robinson told Judge Farmer one night down at the Banker's Club in New York, we can collect a pretty fair amount of evidence upon which to build the tragedy.

On a certain rainy October night in a far western city, "Madame Zola" ended her concert and started from the rear of the theater through the alley to her hansom. The light over the stage door fell aslant a hallway opening into a cheap rooming house across the alley. She was about to pass this hallway when a burly figure turned in from the sidewalk and passed her. Something in his walk arrested her. She

stopped in the foggy drizzle and stepped back involuntarily. As she did so, the burly man raised his head.

The woman's body went cold all over. She gasped a fearful word. The man halted and peered at her.

"*Herbert!*" she whispered.

He was big and rough and unshaven and drunk — exceedingly drunk. He swayed unsteadily in the mist and the light over the stage door she had just quitted made an auriole of iridescent color above his battered derby hat.

But he seemed to come to himself as she spoke his name in that awful voice resulting from the terrific shock of her surprise.

"Who's callin' *me* Herbert? Me? Huh! Ain't heard that name for years and years, I ain't!"

They faced each other in the dripping semi-dark, she rich, cultured, seemingly patrician to her finger tips in the harness of her stage dress; he slovenly, broken down, just an odd fish cast up from the great sea of derelict city life.

"You!" he cried. "You! You! You!"

She did not know what to say. Strength and voice apparently had deserted her.

"What are you doin' here?" he demanded ominously. "Ain't you done me 'nough damage already without followin' me here? Tell me that? Ain't you?"

"I—I haven't followed you here, you fool!" she managed to gasp at last. "Where have *you* been? Where did you go to? It's *you* that needs calling to account. You deserted me—left me penniless. If I hadn't been clever I might have starved!"

"You say that, after what you done to me and

my money! If you hadn't been clever *you* might have starved. Clever! Clever! Yes, *you was* clever! You was damned clever! *You cheat, you!* You cheat!"

"Stop it, you fool! Don't you know you'll wake the whole city and start a scandal? Lower your voice, I tell you!"

He supported himself with one hand against some old iron pipes piled against the near-by brick wall of the theater. He was weak, too, with the tremendous surprise of that meeting but with a far different kind of surprise. He was trying to collect his dazed senses. And something was getting away from him. He was losing control of the great brute animal within him which drink and abuse of the years had nurtured. Before him he fancied he was seeing the cause of all his life's misery. And the devil was over his shoulder, pushing him on.

"Fine lady, ain't you? Fine, fine lady! Them geegaws and everything — fine, fine lady! What man paid for 'em, you —?" and he said a word that struck the woman as a blow across her mouth.

She backed away and went white to the lips.

"You call me that, you vagrant! you gutter-snipe! — you — you bum!" she screamed, forgetting her own admonition of a moment before.

"Yes, me call you that!" he retorted. "Me call you that! Me call you that! And why shouldn't I?" And his voice was like the roar of a bull.

"No man paid for them," she retorted in deadly voice. "I'm paying my own way — with my voice, — and no thanks to a dirty street loafer fit only for the gutter!"

"And who sent me to the gutter?" he cried wildly, choking on his words. Again he repeated the

unprintable word. "Who sent me to the gutter? Who but a hell-cat with a heart o' ice that bled me dry and cheated me from bein' a man? Tell me that! Oh, you she-devil! Oh, you she-devil!" And he lurched forward.

"Lay one of your dirty fingers on me and you'll go to jail for life!" she cried hysterically.

He did not reply this time. He simply swayed there with a wild unhealthy light burning suddenly behind his bloodshot eyes.

Then in the next instant he lurched at her. With the agility of insanity, despite his size he lurched at her, as though all the accumulated misery and heartaches and vicissitudes of the years were his to avenge on human flesh and blood at last. It was as though he had been waiting years and years for exactly that moment.

He sprang at her and she screamed. She screamed terribly. Some men heard it in the next block and came a-running. Some people in the lodging house above heard it also and ran for the windows and peered fearfully downward. A policeman heard it over in front of the corner saloon out on the main street and meditated whether he should go swiftly to where it sounded or turn discreetly down the side thoroughfare.

For when poor Herb Truman lurched his burly weight upon the wife of his young manhood, he held in his scabby fist one of the short ugly pieces of pipe that had been piled beneath his hand against the wall of the theater.

He beat her down, once, twice, three times he belted at her — terribly, horribly.

The pipe crunched on soft human flesh nauseatingly. It had a ragged end and full in her unpro-

tected face the Henderson girl received it. A man in the lodging house above stairs testified next day that he saw the assailant stamp on the woman's prostrate body after she had fallen inert on the cement floor of the alleyway. But he was recovering from a three-day indiscretion himself and his testimony may not be entirely trustworthy.

Anyhow, when help did arrive, headed by the policeman who had decided to do his duty, seven men found one woman battered into insensibility, weltering in a great sickening pool of human blood, and her features horribly mashed by a blunt instrument thrown or dropped into the open doorway of that lodging house hall.

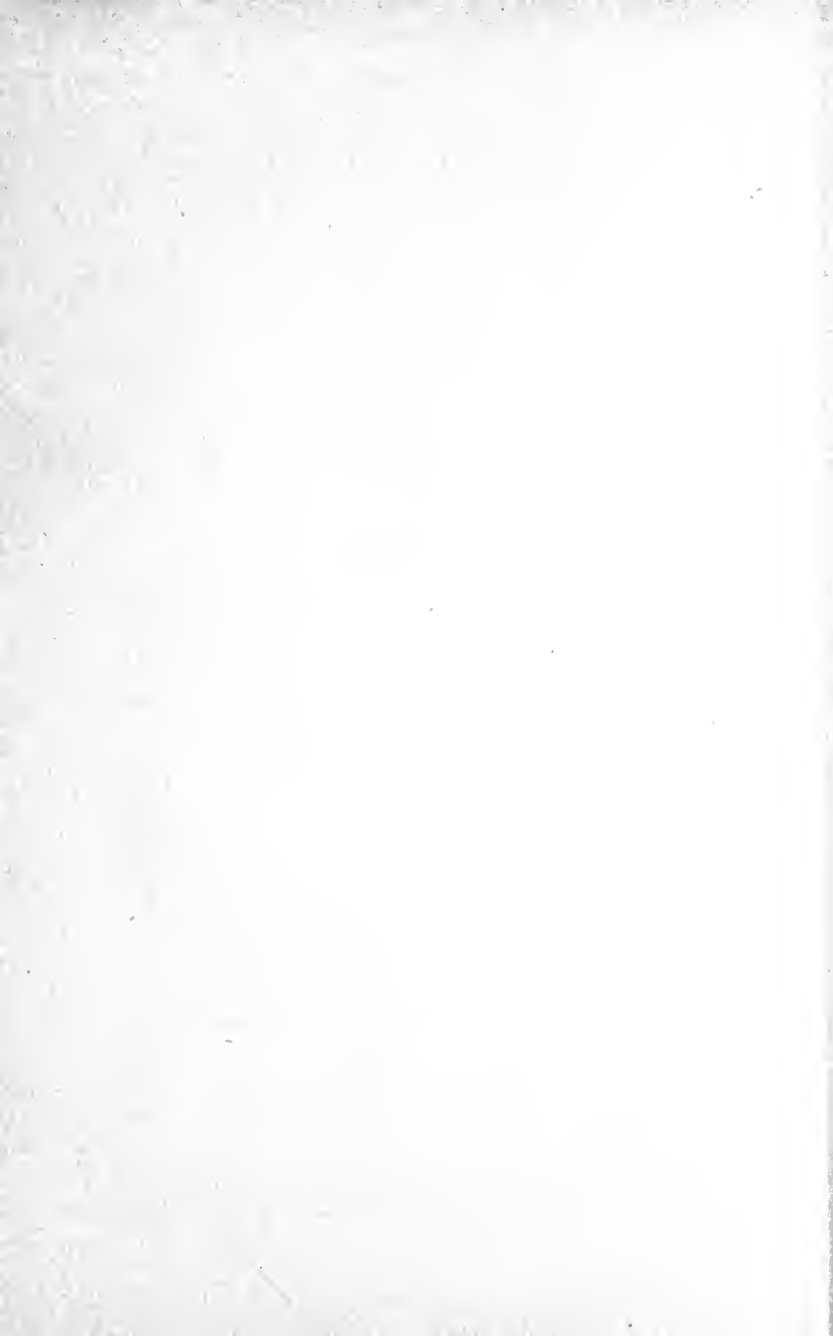
And though the lodging house and the city were searched, they did not find the assailant.

Three months later a woman was discharged from the hospital in that city with a face a hideous thing to behold, one side of her mouth drawn together and closed permanently.

As Uncle Joe Fodder had often remarked: "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord."



PART III



EVENING

CHAPTER I

IN WHICH WE CONSIDER THE CHANGES TIME HAS WROUGHT IN THE LAST TWENTY YEARS AND FOR THE LAST TIME, PRAISE GOD, SEE MARY PURSE BEARING NOBLY THE LAST GREAT DISAPPOINTMENT OF HER LIFE.

ACCORDING to Joe Bardwell — *the* Joseph Bardwell — a Paris man who has gained fame with two novels and interminable short stories so that his name is often on the magazine covers of Service's News Room, — according to Joseph Bardwell who is in a place to know, the most difficult part of writing a book is to convey skilfully and convincingly the passing of time.

This is especially true if the narrative covers the entire lives of a group of people. Due allowance must be made "for them periods when nothin' didn't happen", as Uncle Joe Fodder would put it. For there are such times in the lives of all of us. Comedy and tragedy leave such a terrific effect upon us because they break in upon lives that are running the even tenor of their way, careers that on the whole are uniformly quiet and prosaic. They are the paragraph marks and chapter-headings in the journal of existence.

Coming down to concrete things and following the lives of the particular people with whom our story

has to do, we may say without fear of successful contradiction that the years from 1896 to 1912 saw more changes in American life than any other period in the history of our people or our nation. We can close the files here now and lay them back on top the green box safe. All too vividly memory will serve us and as for the rest, our story must come down for its close into modern times.

The first thing of which we have taken note is the change in the life of our town, which is a counterpart of hundreds of American towns scattered all over the continent. Business blocks went up several stories and wooden structures descended under the crowbar of the building wrecker. We paved Main Street and built a jail. Fat, sociable, boxlike old houses painted dirty white gave way to cupolas and bay windows and softer hues and trimmings. We razed our white picket fences and allowed our lawns a breathing chance. We bought a fire truck and a policeman's uniform and made Mike Hogan, our chief of police, who hitherto had gone about in his suspenders, climb into the latter, station himself at the corner of Main and Maple streets Saturday nights and Sunday afternoons and make motions with his hands. Thus we arose to the grandeur of a traffic cop and took great pride in him until he had "bawled us out" publicly a few times for driving our automobiles with a light blinked out and then we declared him a nuisance and started a petition to have him removed.

In our homes we took up our carpets and laid down art rugs. The graphophone with the old wax records and morning-glory horn was consigned to the attic and in the corner of our "libraries" we installed what resembled an old-fashioned music

box on top of a wine cabinet but which was really Caruso and McCormick and Gluck ready at a moment's notice to fill the neighborhood with art. We consigned the old red tablecloths to limbo and went in for Haviland china. The less furniture we could get into a room the better it was furnished and the prosperity of a family was not reckoned by its acres but by the number of silver birches on its lawn and the width of its front piazza.

Our social life changed also. Young people became old and old people became young. The acme of ambition for our rising generation was to grow up and shake the dust of the place from their negro-polished shoes and dwell amid purple and fine linen in the cities. We became a nation of speed maniacs, and life insurance statistics on the insanity rate were used to prove that we were a great nation.

And while these changes were in progress, what shall be said of our townsfolk themselves and especially the folk whose history we have followed? Where are the folk of yesteryear, indeed? Where are the faces we once knew, the voices that were so familiar? Scattered to the four corners of the tired old earth, most of them, or sleeping quietly in the cemetery on the hill. And in their places are strange folk, faces and voices which we know and yet do not know, — upstarts and usurpers, acquaintances instead of friends, names to fill the census and the telephone directory and not human souls whose joys were our joys and failures our failures, whose successes were our successes and their griefs our griefs.

Even the people of our narrative are different folk, alas, than we recognized them yesteryear. We are on the third and last part of our story now, — the

final lap toward home and the Greater Glory. And in this last act of life's play the make-up of our actors must be changed.

We have seen Sam Hod a young newspaperman, very deliberate and precise in all he did, gravely deporting himself, striving to build a newspaper which should be respected and sworn by among all kinds and classes everywhere. We look upon him now with his hair gray, his moustache ragged, his eyes old and philosophical and tired. We have seen the people of our office young and careless and heart-free, thinking only of the good time coming in the evening after work. We look upon them now toil-worn and care-bent, with families and responsibilities, going down the hill of life and hugging closer and closer in the evening hours to their easy chairs and rockers.

And what of the heroine of this heroless narrative? What of Mary Purse? What, indeed? For the time has come when we must also look on Mary when she is old, for time spares not the heroes and heroines more than it does the adventuresses and villains.

During the years of her wifehood and motherhood that she had been absent from the office, she had altered somewhat from the nimble girl we once had known. Her hands, once so deft and delicate and slender, had become red and stiff and contorted with labor. She couldn't set the "string" of the years before. But she didn't appear to notice that. Or if she did, she never mentioned it for fear she might discount herself in the eyes of the office powers and lose her place. Day after day she toiled at the case and then drove home at the supper hour, and, doing the housework for those growing boys, worked far into the night.

Oh, that we could stop and set down here in detail some of the struggles that woman went through as the seasons went slowly by and bills came in which must be paid, and cruel setbacks and handicaps and hardships interrupted the noble work she was doing, — work for which it seemed there never could be an adequate reward. Sam Hod, who from time to time has glanced over these pages while they were in composition, is wrathful indeed that so much prominence has been given to the days and times and folk that came before Jack left us and Mary's work since crowded into one petty chapter.

"The time since she was left a widow is the real story of Mary Purse, you fat-head," he has again and again declared.

But Sam Hod does not realize that there is no drama in one aging widow woman coming into the village day after day and working through the hours at a type case and going home at night to order the household for a family of growing boys and the old Morrow woman. Those years might be replete with childhood tragedies and bumps and bruises and the vagaries of expanding boyhood and youth, but they would only weary the reader. Those years from Jack's passing to the time that the youngest Purse boy left to take a job down in Boston are one of those periods of Uncle Joe Fodder's when "nothin' didn't happen." All we can set down is that she did her task somehow, — the task almost beyond her strength, and yet a task in which will power and mother love and her husband's memory triumphed and which she completed. And her only remuneration as she went along was the fervent hope that Thomas Joshua would not fail her, — that he would turn out a preacher.

But we might as well have it first as last: Tom Purse did not turn out a preacher.

The old Seminary on the north side of Putnam Square was burned down in nineteen hundred and Paris built a fairly up-to-date school. In due course of time Tom entered this institution and on his graduation went up to the University of Vermont. We learned that he was working in one of the Burlington newspaper offices to pay his expenses and tuition, — with what his mother sent him, which she saved and had ready from God only knows where. He was a quiet, studious boy, very intense in everything he did and his high marks won him a scholarship in his third year. That helped some. He was valedictorian at Commencement.

The night he came back to Paris, he and his mother drove out to the Purse place together. She had not been able to afford the trip to the graduation because the twins were coming along and wanted to get through Middlebury in another two years. It was a rainy day in the last of June and neither mother nor son felt like talking, but that was not altogether because of the rain.

They reached home and Tom put up the horse. Mrs. Morrow was growing more and more feeble. The other boys had not returned from school or from work and with Mrs. Morrow in her chair in the kitchen asleep, mother and son were alone.

"Well," Mary said softly, "at any rate, one of you boys has had a college education."

"Yes, Ma."

Tom arose and took a couple of turns up and down the room. He was a big, strapping fellow now — six feet in his stockings — with sharp forceful features and a steel-gray eye. He pulled out his college

Jimmy-pipe and filled it thoughtfully, standing by the window and looking out into the fragrant rainy night.

"Tommy," breathed the mother fearfully at last, from her place before the devastated dishes, "— is it *all* completed, Tommy?"

The young man flushed deeply.

"You mean, Ma, the — the — theological school?"

"Yes," she said half-hopefully.

He was a long time in replying and in that moment the mother knew she had another disappointment to bury in her life.

"Confound it, Ma, I hate to say it; I know it hurts you like sin, but what's the use of trying to follow up something I don't care anything about and arn't fitted for?"

"It was the dream of my life, Tommy — from the first night I looked into your little face — that you should some day be a minister. And I'm — I'm willing to keep right on workin', Tommy, to see you get the money to help you out there also —"

"That's the trouble, Ma; you've been working too darned much! I've felt ashamed of it lots of times. But I've got the satisfaction of knowing I didn't cheat. I plugged to get through as hard as you plugged to have me."

"I know you did, son. It wouldn't be in Jack Purse's son to cheat." She waited a long time. Then she said: "And you aren't going to try to be a minister?"

"What's the use, Ma?" he cried without looking into her face. "I'm simply not cut out for it; my bent doesn't lie in that direction. Honest, it doesn't. What's the use of spoiling a good blacksmith to make a rotten preacher?"

"But you don't want to be a blacksmith!"

"You know what I want to be, Ma. We've talked it over times enough."

Mary placed her tired hands to her throbbing temples. Yes, they had talked it over times enough, indeed.

"It's in my blood, mother," Tom went on. "It's something you and dad have bequeathed to me. It's ground into my very bone and fiber. You can't blame me. I was born to it."

"Yes," agreed Mary. "Perhaps you were, Tommy. But if your father had lived, this would about break his heart."

"Because dad was only a second-rater; he never got to the top in his profession. And I'm going to climb to the top — Springfield, Boston, New York! Watch me! And dad married too young and encumbered himself with a family before he could afford it. I shan't do that. I'm a rolling stone until I've rolled myself up to the top of the grade. Then I'll marry and stay there."

"My son — only a newspaperman — like his daddy before him! Oh, well! It doesn't matter; it's honorable even if it's poorly paid. Maybe — maybe some of the other boys will be ministers — although I can't say it'll be the same as if it was you, Tom. You were my first baby, you know. It makes — a difference."

"Mother, don't take on so. I'll be at the top of my profession the same as I stood at the top of my class. And I'll see that you're not sorry you released me 'from the ministerial obligation.'" He said this last with an attempt at pleasantry. But it fell pathetically flat.

She arose and went over to him after a time. He

knew when he looked at her that the situation he had dreaded for months was successfully in the past. She took him by the lapels of his coat with her scrawny hands and he took the Jimmy-pipe from his teeth that she could look into his face.

"Tom," she said. "Then be a good newspaperman. Remember you're dealing with the deep and sacred things of life, the hearts and souls and destinies of men and women!"

"I will, mother," he said quietly.

It was silent in that room for a time. Then the boy said huskily :

"Mother, you won't feel so awful, awful badly if I don't become a preacher, if I become a really good, a really *big* newspaperman?"

The answer was a long time in coming. But it came. She smiled a wonderful smile, as she turned her sweet face up to his as she had turned it up to another man in the bygone years.

"No, Tom," she said brokenly. "I won't feel awful bad,—over it."

And the next night Thomas Joshua Purse left for Boston to take a job on the old *Chronicle*.

He never knew what that decision cost his mother.

CHAPTER II

THE WOMAN WITH THE SCARRED FACE DISCOVERS THAT SELFISHNESS DOES NOT PAY AFTER ALL AND KNOWS THE MEANING OF THE WARNING "VENGEANCE IS MINE; I WILL REPAY, SAITH THE LORD," IN ANOTHER WAY.

THEY sat facing one another across a small side table in the dining room of a quiet little hotel off Broadway. The time was eight in the evening; dinner guests had gone; after-theater supper parties were yet to come. For the present they were almost alone in the rich and silent place excepting for a waiter who leaned against a grating far in the rear and gossiped idly with the cashier in a foreign tongue.

The man was a striking personality. Out of his long massive features glinted hard eyes of cold gray. His nose and mouth and chin were adamant and a trifle sinister. His age might have been fifty if one averaged his youthful athletic carriage with the head of iron-gray hair parted on one side and brushed back in a hoary mane above his forehead. He was clothed in expensive but sober black; there was a heavy diamond glinting on his right hand. About him was an air of success, — of a man who had forged to the front and made the world yield him his measure of its wealth.

The woman who sat opposite him with elbows on the table edge and hands clasped against her cheek may have been of equal age but the years had dealt

more harshly with her than with him, or she may have attempted to get more out of them than the man had done. Her face was lined and counter-lined with a million tiny wrinkles which she had plainly tried to hide with cosmetics; her hair was iron gray, although the fatal pathos of its color had been somewhat offset by the clever and modish manner in which it had been treated. The woman's eyes were tired eyes now, but they were more than that; they were hungry eyes, wistful eyes, bewildered eyes, — eyes in which it would require much more emotion to make the tears well and the cheeks become ridiculous.

And her face was scarred, a faint scar to be sure, and cleverly treated by surgeons whose fees were written in four figures. But the mouth remained partially closed; all the skill of facial surgery in the world had failed to make the lips function normally again. Which, if the musical world knew the whole truth, had been the enforced reason for the disappearance of one Madame Zola from the concert and operatic stage.

Neatly the man tapped the ash from his long cigar into the base of the safety-match holder at his right. He restored the cigar to his lips and replaced his elbows on the table's edge. Then he stroked his heavy powerful chin with a capable hand. His level gray eyes were upon the woman. In them was no pity, no emotion, no compassion for any one or anything.

"It is one of those situations in life," he said in his low matter-of-fact tone, "which must be looked at sensibly. Both of us have lived beyond the years of sophomoric sentiment — although there are times, I will admit, when I'd give many dollars to

return to them again and not know many things which I've since discovered in life. So let's change the subject, Mibb, because it bores me by its very absurdity."

"But it isn't absurd, Dick!" protested the woman, and in her tone and the manner of its expression lay a pitiful indication of her weakness to cope with the situation, yet a desperation that it must be done somehow, if by no other method than perseverance. "It's big and vital to me, Dick. Oh, Dick! Don't you know what it means to me?"

"No," returned Dick Robinson coldly. "What does it mean to you?"

"The — the — end, Dick!"

"End of what?"

"Life, love, hope — everything." Her voice as she said it was sunk to a whisper.

"I told you a long time ago that dramatics always disgusted me, Mibb."

"Dick! I'm in earnest, Dick! It isn't dramatics. I mean it, Dick! I've reached the end."

"And I believe you had reached the end also with Herb Truman, and Young Ezekial and all the various other male satellites who have had more or less bearing on your mundane orbit, Mibb."

"Dick! My Gawd, Dick! Don't say that; don't talk that way about — things. It's burning, blistering acid on my naked heart —"

"Oh, rot, Mibb! If your heart's so nude, pull something over it. I don't want to be brutal and you're a good sport, Mibb — but make a fight and get your balance —"

"It's — what you have just said — the most cruel thing I've ever heard, and I've had lots of — cruel things said to me —"

"Mibb, you'll have me saying lots worse things in a moment. You're making a scene, you've —"

"No, I haven't taken too much, and I will make a scene if it means —"

"Now look here, Mibb; we've got to have an understanding and we'll have it right here and now; you're provoking it. I'm sorry for you, although not in just the way you think. I can see exactly how you feel and if I could I would help you."

"You can help me!"

"But not by marrying you —"

"Yes, by marrying me! Why not? What's the past few years meant — all the times we've had together — and the trips and the talks and the suppers and parties; what have they meant if not matrimony. What could a woman think? — Dick! Dick! — Don't go back on me now! Gawd, Dick — don't tell me it's all —"

"Well, what?"

"— entertainment — and nothing more, Dick. I've had a hard row to hoe. I've been — unfortunate, it seems, in everything I've taken up, everything I've tried to do. And I'm on the level in this, on the level with you, I've been on the level all along, and I thought at last I was coming into a little peace and rest after it all. What have I done to get this — what have I done."

The tears that came up in her tired and burned-out eyes only caused the man to tap off more cigar-ash calmly and look at her in vivisectional interest — cold interest — as he would consider the improperly-timing functions of a machine that was suddenly doing strange and inexplicable things.

"I never thought it was in you, Mibb," he said finally. "I thought you were more sensible."

"Sensible? Ain't I sensible, Dick? Ain't it the most sensible thing in the world for me to want—you? After what I've gone through and suffered and been cheated out of —"

"Mibb, let's discuss this thing like a sane man and a sane woman. Looking backward for a moment I can remember a night twenty-eight years ago when you and I with a lot of other young folks up home sat around a fire in a little shack up in the mountains."

"Don't I remember it? Haven't I thought of it thousands of times, Dick? Wished I could go back to that night and live the years over again —"

The man frowned at the interruption. But he went on:

"— and Herb Truman — poor old Herb! got sentimental and proposed an extraordinary thing —"

"Yes, poor old Herbert! Look what he did to me! Look at my face —!"

"— he proposed, Mibb, that thirty years from that night we should all gather together again and the one who had made the greatest success of his or her life should get the gold-piece that was to be left under the miser's hearthstone."

"And that's what I'm trying to do, Dick! — in wanting to marry you, making a success of my life, taking up the life of a real woman, settling down —"

"Please don't interrupt me, Mibb. On that night, at the threshold of our lives, so to speak, we started to face the world and take our places in society and work out our destiny, the manner of men and women which we were."

"Don't open old wounds!"

"We were about equally divided, boys and girls — men and women. There was no stipulation

what shape our successes were to take. The boys were supposed to be judged on their careers as men; the women were not to be compared to them, but on their careers as women. The greatest success, the fullest life — that was the criterion of achievement — ”

“I didn’t know as much then as I know now, Dick. I was only a silly girl that hadn’t awakened — ”

“— and we all agreed that if we were living thirty years in the future and it was humanly possible to do so, we would gather again and see who had made their lives worth while, whether they had indeed realized success in the vocation to which they turned themselves. Business, the professions, the making of money for the men; careers for the women, perhaps; perhaps motherhood, wifehood; it didn’t matter. We would all of us recognize quickly when that gathering time came, to whom the gold-piece belonged. The point was that we were conscious of our situations on the threshold of life; we had our lives and careers ahead to mould as we saw fit. We were free moral agents. If we won, we would have ourselves to applaud; if we lost and made a failure of life, we would have no one but ourselves to thank.”

“Dick! I can’t stand it to listen to this; I just can’t; not after what you’ve told me just now — ”

“But you’re going to listen to it, Mibb, because I know what’s good for you. It won’t hurt you to hear the truth. All your life you’ve dodged the truth; you’ve avoided looking unpleasant subjects or situations squarely in their faces; you’ve floated with the current of existence and trusted and expected it to waft you into pleasant places.”

"Dick! I never expected to have to stand this from you."

"You are upset because when it came to a showdown I've balked on making you my wife. You want to know the reason. I'm telling you now, Mibb. It's unpleasant but it's high time you cultivated a little fiber in your soul to stand unpleasant things."

The woman clenched her thin and bloodless hands.

"I'm not going into the careers of any one in that crowd but your own, Mibb. You went back to town from that Gold-Piece Party the same as all the rest of us; you had your chance —"

"And I tried the same as all the rest of you; Herb Truman had money — give me credit for trying to better myself in marrying him, Dick — and I thought that success meant bettering myself that way. If I made a wrong calculation in that, in the estimate of money being the estimate of success, give me credit for trying."

"I'm not discounting your endeavor, your attempt, as you call it. There was nothing wrong with that. The point was that your idea of success was the height of selfishness you could attain for yourself. You didn't want to measure your success by the things which you could do in the world; you wanted to measure your success by the things you could avoid and money helped you to avoid them. You married Herb, not to make him a successful wife, but to acquire the money to make your life easy and filled with physical comfort."

"I was only a girl, Dick. Look at my mother and father! Could you blame me?"

"Blame you? Of course I blame you! With the exception of Jack Purse and Mary Wood there

wasn't one of us in the crowd but what had just as poor apologies in the shape of parents as yourself. You knew just as much as the rest of us did, that there was work in the world to be done, a share cut out for each of us to do. Deliberately you ignored it. I happened to know that a few days after that Gold-Piece Party you openly taunted Mary Wood for marrying poor honest, earnest Jack Purse; you taunted her for marrying poor, for condemning herself to a life of work and household drudgery and child-bearing and all the rest that's a humble woman's portion. You were selfish, Mibb, and that selfishness has hounded you right down to the present, in everything you've done — in every decision you've made — in everything you've taken up."

"I've seen my mistake, Dick. I want to —"

"No, you haven't seen your mistake. You want to marry me for the same reason you wanted to marry Herb Truman and young Ezekial and all the rest of the boys who had money — to save your own skin, Mibb; to better yourself physically. Personal service doesn't enter into it at all, Mibb —"

"Oh, how cruel — how heartless you are!" she moaned.

"Not a bit of it! Merely sensible."

"As your wife I could —"

"As my wife you could do absolutely nothing more than you are doing now — give me your society. And for that society I pay you what it is worth."

"How about a home —?"

"I have a home. It cost me seventy thousand dollars and it is all that I desire. I have efficient servants who keep it well ordered —"

"Is that all a home means, Dick?"

"Don't let's talk about children at our ages, Mibb. It's disgusting, if that's what you mean. As for your society in my home, it would be of no more value to me there than it is in the places we have been going together the past few years; no, there is absolutely nothing which you could give me as my wife. On the other hand, there is much more that I would be called upon to give you: my name — which I may say without egotism is of no small value and not lightly to be bestowed — my money, my liberty, the concentration of my fancy solely on one woman whom I am sure in time would bore me —"

"So I bore you, do I: the last two years I've been boring you? Then why continue —?"

"No, you have not bored me yet, for the reason that we have not seen enough of one another to become bored with one another's eternal society —"

"And you call yourself a successful man — and a gentleman."

"I do not, Mibb. There is a difference between us. One side of my life — the life of a normal man which should be well rounded out before he can call himself wholly successful — one side of me has been dwarfed and stunted, the family part, through agencies with which women like yourself have had much to do. That's irrelevant to what we're discussing, Mibb. I'm saying that there's nothing you could give me that I'm not getting now; yet there's much that I could give you for which I would get no value in return. So it would not be a fair bargain. And an unfair bargain is no bargain — in my philosophy. To get back to your personal career: Within a few years after your tempestuous marriage to Herb you left him — or he left you —"

"He was a drunken sot! He was a brute! I could tell you —"

"I knew Herb Truman as well as you did. We were chums together before you ever married him. He was a big-souled, lovable boy. All he wanted was to be mothered. He never had a mother of his own any more than I ever had one. He didn't know it was a mother he craved; I didn't know it either until I became older. But that's what he wanted and in a fashion he married you to get it."

"Get what?"

"Mothering."

The man looked straight as a lance at the woman. Her eyes fell guiltily.

"He wanted mothering, I say," Robinson went on. "Every man wants it from a woman. I don't care how old men grow, they're only boys at heart. And when they grow up and get lonely and out of sorts they want some one to whom they can bring their troubles and get sympathy and help. A successful wife understands that, though perhaps she couldn't put it into fine phrases, — it would sound maudlin. In their boyhood days a mother fills that place. It's the sterling-true function of woman-kind without which she's merely female and nothing else; men come to look for it in all women — that influence over them — that sympathy, and wherever you find an unhappily married man you find a fool of a woman too small-bored to recognize it. You were too selfish and thoughtless to do that to Herbert. He became discouraged without knowing why he was discouraged. He sought relief for his nameless heartache in drink. One thing led to another and he wandered away, God knows where. He became a derelict because he was despondent over a great

disappointment which stood out in his life irremediable, so he thought, or at least he lost interest in things because he was out of accord with all the world, and he — not you! — paid the price!”

“Dick, haven’t you any heart at all? Are you a cad after all; can’t you see how this is —”

“Mibb, did anybody ever take the time or trouble to tell you this before?”

“No one ever did because they had too much regard for my feelings.”

“Then it’s time some really good friend of yours cast aside pretty conventionalities and gave you a strong look at the naked truth. Sit quiet and hear me out; there’s lots more I have to tell you. I’m coming down to my own career in a moment, why I hold these ideas that I do — why I won’t marry you, or any woman. That should interest you, what?”

“Yes,” she whispered miserably.

“Very good. There was once a boy, Dick Robinson; remember him? He was a good sort — before he went money-mad. But there was a time when he wasn’t money-mad. He loved you sincerely and deeply. He would have made you a good husband. But you refused him, so long as there was money to be married elsewhere, and when you finally came around to him in after years and displayed interest in him, the damage had been done. You had sent him into his money-madness; his idea at first was to acquire so much that it would make you sorry. When he got going he generated so much momentum that he couldn’t stop. The stuff owned him — got him as booze gets some men. But at the same time he’d generated enough common sense — if you want to call it that — to see that you weren’t after him

for the sake of love for him; it was his money and what it meant. And by that time he loved his money too much to let you dig your lily-white fingers, your greedy fingers, deeply down into his pile. He went away from you. You had sent one man to disgrace directly as the result of your lack of maternity, Mibb; you sent Dick Robinson's soul to hell, the hell of worship of seven per cent, by your choice of wealth over honest love and willingness to get down and work honestly for it beside a man who loved you. But that isn't all, Mibb —"

"I am a hell-cat, ain't I?" said the woman bitterly. But it was sarcasm and her voice was broken.

"No, just merely selfish, fearfully selfish; selfishness has been at the bottom of every shadow which has crossed your life, Mibb."

"You! Telling this to me, after all the ways you've made money and the things you've done."

"Careful, Mibb. Maybe I've made folks come up to the scratch in business but I've gone on the level."

"And you don't admit that your life has been selfish? That you are living selfishly now — alone and without a family — and for your own enjoyment; not helping anybody or doing anything to make the world better?"

"No; I haven't gone to extremes in this thing. And as for selfishness, at least I haven't always looked for the easiest way around things. I haven't dodged hard work. I haven't asked others to carry my burdens, or finance me, or permit me to live on the fruits of their labors."

"You're a man. You're supposed to do hard things and carry burdens and finance yourself. I'm — I'm a woman!"

The man raised his eyebrows.

"That, Mibb," he said, "is the most absurd thing you've said to-night. Let's quit this," he snapped. "I'll be saying things for which I'll be sorry, things unbecoming a man who tries to preserve the appearance of a gentleman."

"No," she said with feminine perversity. "You've started; go ahead and finish! You've asked me if I wanted to know why you haven't married; why you won't marry me when — when" — her voice suddenly softened into a strange mellow thing and rang with the pain of it, "— when I love you, Dick!" she concluded lamely. "Might as well finish what you'd begun. You've hurt me already — more than I can — feel."

But for a moment he simply sat quiet, his eyes upon her, his heavy lips closed firmly. He sat quiet until his queer fit of temper passed. His face gradually softened. Over his features came a look of hunger and homesickness and longing, melancholy — heartache. It was a rather startling change. He picked up a fruit knife and drew lines with its point in the cloth.

Twice he looked at her and dropped his eyes again. There was a trace of cynicism in his voice as he said :

"Mibb, I'm not a woman-hater. But I've simply lost faith in you women. I never knew a mother, though like poor Herb, I felt the need of one. When I grew up, if I was attracted to women it was for companionship and sympathy and help. But somehow I never connected right. The longer I looked the more bitter I became, Mibb. Women for wives indeed — women for pleasure, women for business, women for careers — plenty of women for every-

thing but to go to with a weary head and a heart-ache and get a little help and inspiration and strength for the soul. Oh, Mibb! You don't know it — don't realize it — and few women there are that do; but the crying need of the age and the heart of men is for that kind of women, the maternal women, Mibb."

For an instant the woman forgot her own misery in her stark surprise. This! — from Dick Robinson.

"Years ago, Mibb, before women went outside the home and into business and got all snarled up with fads and isms, they didn't have much else to occupy their attention but home and folks and kids. All these folks who want to 'mend the status of poor down-trodden and abused womankind' say it was narrowing and degrading and enslaving. But Mibb, it *did* make mothers! The business of women was to marry and have homes and stay in those homes and raise little kids. That was their function in life and having no other it was inbred into their bone generation after generation. Look at the homes of fifty or a hundred years ago, Mibb. Look at some of those on the Vermont hillsides back around Paris. There's nothing like those old homesteads to-day, Mibb. They've all gone with the 'old-fashioned' women that used to live in them."

The woman wanted to say something but she didn't know just what it ought to be.

"I suppose industries that have come in to make women's work easier, and yet that have taken her at the same time out of the home and into business, are responsible, Mibb. Perhaps I'm wrong in judging you so harshly. But oh, Mibb — inside — deep inside, there's the awful heart-hunger in a lot of men to know what their grand-daddies knew, yet

who never placed a value on it because it hadn't been denied them. We're not raising families any more, Mibb. We're only having kids. We're not making homes. We're renting a place to live in and furnishing it with stuff bought at a store. Everything's shallow and transitory and unsatisfactory and addled. Half the time we don't know what the matter is with us, we men of to-day. But it's that we're getting away from nature, away from the family idea, away from solid substantial rugged foundations of living."

The man drew a deep breath. For a moment his jaw closed hard. Then he went on :

"Oh, I know we've got women that are well enough willing to marry the men, girls still fall in love with the boys and the boys with the girls. But I couldn't take a clerk out of my office and put him half the time in my engineering department and expect him to keep on improving as clerk, following up the job, growing more and more efficient in his line — when all the time I'm distracting his energies and making him neither one nor the other. And it's much the same with you women, Mibb. The girls to-day marry the boys, true enough, and they rent a place and furnish it and raise their babies. But there's a hundred things to attract them and distract them and take them outside the home while at the same time they try to keep the home; and gradually the home instinct of generations is being ironed out of them, Mibb. They want to do a woman's work and at the same time they want to do a man's work, and the good Lord only knows what to call the things they do. They're forgetting how to really truly mother, Mibb. I heard a dam-fool female the other day get up on a soapbox and yell

that the child was the jailer of the mother. As if there was any reason why it shouldn't be, Mibb? And all mankind knows is that something has been tipped over and upset somewhere and he's all at sea and doesn't know where he gets off or what's coming. And pretty soon, either *en masse* or as an individual, he commences to feel that he doesn't give a damn, Mibb. And when a man gets to the point that he doesn't give a damn, he isn't over-careful about his relations in other matters. It's all a mixed-up and lamentable mess, and God only knows who's responsible. But it's coming over all society, Mibb, more and more every year and — well — the kids that are growing up to-day are showing it."

Again the woman did not know what to say. She felt as if Dick Robinson had waded off beyond her depth and if she tried to follow him she would flounder. If she had been where she had been thirty years before, up in Gold-Piece cabin, she might have tried to follow him. But she had dissipated the heritage that had once been hers. She must pay the penalty, the penalty of silence — silence more than the mere silence of speech.

"Mibb," he concluded in a hollow voice, "what this old world needs to-day more than it ever needed it before, isn't women to run business and make governments and all that rot. I suppose it's all right in its way to have women leavening up things a trifle, but they've gone and overdone it, Mibb; they're overdoing it already. They need to get back to first principles, back to the good old-fashioned family idea of home interest and unselfish devotion to the heartaches of little kids and the solid substantial fundamentals that the family is the basis

of society, and there's not a place on God's earth where a man can learn to be a square business man, a decent citizen, a credit to this creator, that beats his mother's knee, Mibb. Bring on your damned old arguments about the uplift of society and purification of government and the refining influence of women in business. Talk your head off! That won't take from the heart of a man the ache after something he can't express, the feeling that he's all at sea somehow, or it won't put into his soul the wholesome love and veneration and respect that he had for his mother who was a woman and a wife first, even if it cost her her life and her reason. Mothers? The world's heartsick for them, Mibb. God, I wish I had one — right now!"

Finally the woman spoke.

"Well, I don't suppose I can say anything on that score, Dick. Sometimes I've felt something was wrong in my own life. I've had some fearfully lonely moments, Dick, when I wondered if what the matter with me was — was —"

"Go ahead and say it!" ordered the man. "It's nothing to be ashamed of! Kids! — that's it, isn't it? And why didn't you have them; do you suppose if poor Herb had had three or four kids he'd gone off the way he did? Why didn't you have them, Mibb? Because of the way you was brought up. Your mother kept trying to save you from what she called the drudgery of the home. I know; I remember. She put pretty clothes on you and did all she could to discourage you from becoming a mother. Why did she do it? Because she wasn't a mother herself. Oh, she may have gone through hell and brought you into the world. But that's only an incident in motherhood, Mibb. She

wasn't living naturally in her own home herself; she was the pants and the check book and the wage earner of your home — I remember how your dad sat around Will Seaver's store in the old days rather than smoke his pipe with his feet on his own sitting-room stove at home. And you had motherhood and homelife ironed out of you the same as millions of young girls are getting it ironed out of them to-day."

"Then you admit I wasn't to blame — wholly, Dick."

"But I hold it was up to you when you reached maturity and age of reason yourself, to correct the trouble, just as it's up to the women of to-day to do it. Lord, the men can't do it; the women have got to do it for themselves."

"But you'll admit that the drudgery of the home is —"

"Drudgery of the home — hell! There's no drudgery of the home only what women make for themselves. There's drudgery everywhere. All of us have got to sweat our clothes for the things we make the world hand over to us. It's all in the way you look at a thing; what your mental attitude is. I suppose sawing wood is one of the hardest kinds of labor. Yet don't you remember old Bill Fletcher up home? He said the Lord sent him into the world a-purpose to saw wood and he was made to saw wood, and he was going to saw wood and saw wood he did. The man was supremely happy in sawing wood. It's the same with anything and everything. It's all in your mental attitude. If you're a woman and hate housework and motherhood and don't use your brains in your work and don't know how to mother your husband and your boys and

get the best results by the shortest route, like you'd have to do to be successful in business, naturally what you have to do in your natural sphere will be drudgery, won't it? And if you go on creating this mangling myth about the drudgery of the home and pass it on to your daughter and she skims it over as quickly as she can and passes the idea on to her daughter, pretty soon the drudgery of the home is going to be a reality, isn't it? But if you love your home and your babies and look at your life work as the biggest job under God's heaven, bringing human beings to life and caring for them and rearing them into the stature of strong men and noble women — if your mental attitude is right — there won't be much drudgery in it, will there?"

"Dick," said the woman after a long time. "I'm sorry; oh, I'm so sorry for lots of things. The pity of it is that for me — it's too late to mend. I guess — I guess — you've told the truth, Dick. I do know what's the matter with me. Yes, I'll confess it. It was the kids, the little kids of my own that I never had. I've lived a lonely, abnormal life and I guess — I guess — it's up to me to pay the penalty. Gawd, haven't I paid the penalty?" she cried it out suddenly. "Dick, perhaps it was the longing for some remnant of that satisfaction that I was seeking — though I wouldn't hardly dare confess it to myself — when I went around with you, hoping that —"

"Hoping that I'd marry you? It's too late, Mibb. I've seen too much; I'm all burned out inside. I'm burned out and blue and discouraged and cynical. It's been my lot to run up against only the modern women — meaning the kind that sort of break out in a riot when some one dares to

say that woman's place is in the home. Maybe it's because I came away from a little town so early in life. Whatever it is, it's done for me."

There was an awful pathos in Dick Robinson's voice. And something stirred in the woman across the table, — the woman who had wasted the substance of her womanhood in selfish living. Perhaps it was the latent spark of maternity; heart answering heart in the loneliness of worldliness. A choke came in her parched throat. She reached forth her hands convulsively.

"Dick," she whispered, "if you'd only let me help you; if you only would!"

"You can't!" he declared harshly. "No woman can. I've seen so much now that I wouldn't trust the best woman that ever drew breath. The time for that is on the threshold of life, not in the exit out into the late afternoon, when everything's in the future and a man needs a woman's help and a home behind him and a family to bind and inspire him. Oh, Mibb! There's so many women — and men too — who like to argue how women live beside men and fight beside men and ought to vote beside men, and dish out a beautiful lot of claptrap about how legislation is going to change this, that and the other evil that's afflicting society. But take it from an old rounder, Mibb; that's all irrelevant and shallow and on the surface. It doesn't go deep enough, Mibb. It doesn't get down to the bedrock and the hard-pan of human nature and alter the causes that are spreading the disease of social dissatisfaction. You can't legislate old mother Nature, Mibb. You can't rip out in a generation all that's been imbedded in the race since the dawn of time. The trouble is that women are consciously

or unconsciously forgetting how to mother, Mibb — mother their kids or their menfolk — they're simply killing the maternal instinct by distractions. Our industrial generation means families moving around from town to town where wages are highest; camping out in rented quarters, getting away from the land, from substantial domestic foundations. We're going through a sort of racial hysteria for shorter methods, quicker results, labor-saving devices, a million distractions and diversions — and it's making everything, even motherhood and domestic life, over into the same hit-or-miss, off-again-on-again-gone-again pabulum. And where we're all going to bring up, the good God in His infinite wisdom only knows. Now you know what I mean when I say I've got no use for your claim a moment ago that I'm expected to carry my burdens and win my battle and shield and protect you women when at the same time you're scrambling away as fast as you can from filling the function you're intended by nature to fill in the heart of a man and the life of his family. Oh, hell, Mibb, I'm sick of it; sick unto death. I'll take your society in the way I've taken it the last two years, — for mental diversion. But soul diversion and satisfaction, and inspiration and that heart-hunger for the thing I call maternity, that's another thing, Mibb. I don't ever expect to know it, and I'm sour and caustic about it inside and there's about as much chance of ever recovering at my time in life as there is for the cost of living to go down. And that's some chance!"

"Dick! Dick! And this, this, after all, is the result of my — life!"

"It looks as if it were, Mibb. Kind of barren

and lonely and unpleasant to look forward to, isn't it?" He recovered his old self with a sigh. "Just think of me in those times; we're a pair of domestic cripples. Let it go at that."

"Stolen sweets — bitter almonds," muttered the woman. "A man can be lonely and forget; but a lonely woman is the loneliest creature on God's footstool."

"Hell! Let's forget it, Mibb. I'm going to order a drink!"

Which he did.

Over in the corner an orchestra began jazzy music for the theater crowd which was coming in.

CHAPTER III

IN WHICH HERB TRUMAN COMES BACK, STAYS FOR BUT A LITTLE WHILE AND THEN GOES HIS WAY ALSO AROUND THE BEND IN THE ROAD BY THE SUMACHS.

IF Tom's decision to pass up the ministry for a newspaperman's career was another great disappointment in his mother's life, Mary never made any fuss about it. If she had ever dreamed of a time when she would look up into a pulpit and see her son there, preaching the message of the good God to a world of sin-sick and heart-hungry men and women, and realized like many other dreams of hers that it would never materialize, she buried that also in her poor tired mother-heart and went on working to educate the rest of the boys.

Tom Purse was a good boy. He was too good for the *Boston Chronicle* office! He had been on the Hub paper a year and seven months, sending what money he could back to his mother, when word came that opportunity had opened for him to go down to New York. He accepted the place and then for a time we lost track of him. Next we heard he was married!

The other boys were coming along now. Fred had taken an agricultural course at Amherst and in the summer he used the poor little hillside farm to try out his experiments. Then he returned to college each fall and left the hired man to reap the

harvest. And many were the phenomenal turnips or apples or melons that Mary brought us to the office with a pathetic pride on her plain features, — features where now all traces of beauty and girlhood had faded, leaving her a plain old woman with hair rapidly growing white. Then, after graduation, the next we heard he had taken a chair in an agricultural college out in Ohio.

For some time Teddy worked for us, carrying papers and washing forms and doing odd jobs. But Teddy's mind worked in mechanical grooves. He nearly killed himself trying out a home-made flying machine. And if we were to hesitate and in a weak moment yield to the wishes of Sam Hod, about the biggest incident of drama we could glean from those years "when nothin' didn't happen" was the time that he constructed an automobile that got away from him at the top of Maple Street hill, careened wildly down into Main Street and went bang into the window of Ben Williams' clothing store. The window was plate glass, and Mary and Teddy had to pay for it. He left school in the second year of a technical course to go with a firm of engineers out in Chicago who wanted young men badly in the prosperous back-fire that resulted from the 1907 panic. Last we heard of Ted, he was on a big bridge job somewhere in western Pennsylvania.

Dick stayed around Paris until he was nineteen. But he was the business man and Yankee trader of the family. He tended store for Alec Potherton, our local shoeman, and stuck to college afterward simply because he thought it would equip him to do a bigger business. He graduated with the help of his brothers — and mother — and then took a

place with a firm of wholesale shoe men in Lynn and Brockton. He used practically his whole salary the first two years in getting his younger brothers, George and Dexter, through school. George plowed through law school, stayed for a time with a firm of Boston attorneys, and then went under his own sail. The last we heard of him, he was married, so for a lawyer he must have prospered.

Dexter was the last to leave, and the day he set out for Pittsburg, there wasn't a more pitiful sight in Paris County than "Aunt Mary." For that was the name the town gave her, — in all kindness.

She laid her frail old hand down quietly on the case and said in a voice trembling with emotion :

"If only one of my boys had turned out a preacher ! But not a one did ! Not — a — one !"

That was the nearest to a complaint we ever heard her make.

They must have been lonesome days for her, after Dexter went. Old faces must have floated at times in the space over her type cases ; old voices called across the years. On gray days it must have come to her that all she had to do was walk around the type rack and find Jack at his old place over the imposing stones, or Daddy Joe over in the ad. alley, or Lawrence Briggs rolling his glass eye around the stove clandestinely to the terror of Annie Seavers and the other girl. But they were all gone. Jack and all of them — excepting Mr. Nimrod Briggs and Sam Hod and herself — and the scribe with the grimy fingers whose pen travels slowly now across this page.

And then came the day when Mary dumped her final stick and went out to the poor Purse Place and never came back.

It was the day when Herb Truman showed up in the village.

For Herbert Truman did one day turn up again in Paris. The door opened one summer's morning, and a big-bodied, loose-jointed, rather dilapidated individual shuffled into the office, dressed in a faded green cutaway coat with two buttons ridiculously high in the back, and a pair of gray trousers badly bagged at the knees. He wore a derby hat, a bosom shirt without a collar and big shoes in which were slits to ease his corns. A week's growth of very white stubble was on an over-pink jowl and he was given to wheezing.

"Is — Jack Purse in? Does he work here now?" asked this seedy individual of Myrtle Corey, our little Marguerite-Clark proofreader.

Myrtle was puzzled.

"Jack Purse! There's only one Purse around here and that's a woman, Aunt Mary Purse, who's leaving us to-day. I don't know whether her husband's name was Jack or not."

"I been away for quite a spell," apologized the derelict. "But Mary Purse was Jack Purse's wife. I remember that, well enough. Is Jack workin' somewheres else?"

"Golly," exclaimed Myrtle, "he's dead. Been dead ever so many years; long before my time!"

"Dead?" The man repeated it in a cracked voice. It didn't appear that he quite comprehended. There was an awkward pause.

"Do you want me to call Aunt Mary?"

"Yes, I'd like to see Mary again!"

Myrtle went out into the back room but came back in a moment alone.

"The foreman says Aunt Mary came to work this

morning but wasn't feeling well and went home, about an hour ago."

"Went home?"

"Out to the poor Purse Place on Cobb Hill."

"The poor Purse place? Did they used to call it the Wheeler place?"

"I believe so."

"I think I been there. Maybe I'll go out. I come back here to see the Purses. I used to know 'em years ago," he said whimsically, somehow child-like.

He was moving toward the door when Sam Hod came in. He cast a curious glance at the visitor. Then something stirred in Sam's memory.

"Good morning," he declared. "It seems to me I remember your face but I can't recall your name —"

"Truman's my name, Herbert Truman! My folks used to own the Truman Carriage Works years ago."

"Good Lord!" cried Sam as he inventoried again the poor derelict on the sea of human life.

He visited with us the balance of the forenoon, and we learned that he had spent much of the intervening time in Missouri and Kansas. He kept making constant references to "my son", so we inferred that he had been married. But what had become of the wife or boy we couldn't quite make out, nor could he tell a very connected story.

"Poor old Herb!" declared Sam, passing me in the back room. "Life has done for him. As the young folks say nowadays, he's a little bit off his base."

"I think," said Herb finally in his childish voice,

"that I'll go out and call on a few folks" and he mentioned several names. But we had to tell him that the people he had come to see, with the exception of Mary Purse, were all moved away, scattered, or dead.

"There's been quite a lot o' changes," he said philosophically. "Mibb Henderson?—is she here?"

We looked at him and wondered if he realized he had once been married to Mabel and what he had done to her one night in the far western city.

"No," we told him. "Harvey Henderson died, you remember. Mrs. Henderson went off with her daughter and we never knew what became of her."

"And you don't know where she is now?"

"No. Not the slightest idea."

"I think," he said, these items making no impression upon him, "I'll go out and visit Mary Purse. I used to like Mary Purse. She'll be glad to see me."

We brushed him off and knocked the dents out of his derby hat, and Sam sent out and bought him a collar and tie so he could look his best to visit Mary. He submitted calmly to the dolling up and claimed he was grateful when Sam gave him two dollars. Then he shuffled out of the office.

It must have taken Herb all day to walk that six miles because it was almost sunset when he turned finally into the Purse yard.

Aunt Mary was sitting on the side porch, just as she had been sitting one day when Herb had entered the yard to tell her the home was hers no longer. She saw the big flabby hulk with the faded green coat and the derby hat which had somehow managed to get the dents back into its crown on the way out, and she took him for a tramp come to beg food.

He approached the steps and stood there for a moment, looking around as though to fix something in his memory.

"Why," he said in simple surprise, "I must o' walked out. And that was foolish. I oughter hitched up Monday-Washin'."

Mary started. Her eyesight was failing her after the long years setting the little type faces. She came down one step and peered closer into his features.

"Herbert!" she said thickly.

Something in her face, her voice, her manner of repeating his name, did the business. His wandering thoughts came back. He recognized her in that moment and he recognized himself, and he looked down at himself and out around the yard as though astonished to find himself there.

"I come out to see you, Mary," he said. "It's a long, long time since we had a talk."

He sat down opposite her precisely as he had seated himself one summer's day in the years before. And the past all rose up again before both of them.

"Where have you been all this time, Herbert?" she asked in a voice mellow with sympathy.

"Somewhere, out there!" he said thickly, with a wave of his frayed arm to the west. "There's been so many places. I can't remember them all. Just sort o' wandered around, Mary, lookin' for happiness. Don't press me about it. It's you I want to hear about."

And she told him. She told him about the home on Pleasant Street and its ending; about Jack's worries and struggles and heart hopes and disappointments. She told him too, about Jack's passing and the years she had spent since in the *Telegraph*

office. She told him about each boy and where he was and what he had become and how well he was doing. And through it all, something of his own old personality coming back through the hazes of an abused mind and memory, he sat there and never interrupted. When she was finished with the story down in the present, it was a different Herbert than the one who had left our office who said:

"And ain't it terrible lonesome for you, livin' out here alone in this Cobb Hill house now that Dexter's gone and old Mrs. Morrow is dead?"

Old Aunt Mary shut her lips tightly to keep back the emotion. But the tears would not stay leashed.

"Yes," she said huskily, "but I love it. I lived here as a girl and dreamed dreams of the future here and left the old russet apple-tree that now is only a lightning blasted stump down in the orchard here, to go to Paris and take up my life work there. It was here that I buried mother. It was here that I came with Jack and our family of six little boys. Life was full of many beautiful things then. And the place still stands for them now. Jack's coffin was carried out this door. One by one I watched the boys go away to college and later out of my life through this chip-cluttered yard and down the road and around the bend where the sumachs hid them.

"No, Herbert, I couldn't leave it. The dear Father knows it's lonely. But it would be lonelier to live somewhere else now without the memories. They are all I've got now — the memories — but they're sweet memories."

The old man rubbed his face and seemed startled to find the stubble upon it. He made as though to say something and then checked himself. For

with her eyes fixed on the peaceful scene in the valley below them Mary was going on :

“The place is filled with ghosts, Herbert, but I am not afraid of the ghosts. There is the ghost of the little girl who played around here and down under the old russet apple-tree and the stone wall and the fence by the woods that have all been cut away. There is the ghost of my mother that comes to me in the evenings and sits with me by the open window when the moon is high and the frogs are peeping. Then there are other little ghosts — boys that once called me mother and that I worked for and gave my life for — and who are somewhere out in the world now doing the world’s work. And yet I see these little ghosts again often, Herbert, toddling through the rooms, playing about the old toy-scarred furniture; it may sound eery to you, but many is the door that I open to feel the presence therein of those who have gone far off. And—I am not afraid.”

Herbert was now quite himself again. But he was a broken-down old man.

“Mary,” he said in his queer cracked voice, “I loved you once, didn’t I? You know that.”

“Yes, Herbert dear, I believe you did.”

“I wish it was so that we could — we could — spend our last few years — together.”

She covered her care-lined features with her gnarled red hands for the moment. She lifted them again with a wonderful gentleness upon her face.

“It would be sacrilege, Herbert,” she said. “Sacrilege to the ghosts — the memories — the ones who are gone. Not now, Herbert. It is too late. If you had come ten years ago when I was

struggling to raise the boys, perhaps the drama of our lives might have had a different ending. But I am an old woman now, Herbert. I feel somehow that my work is almost done. When Jack died, the minister who is also old now preached a beautiful sermon about loaning our loved ones to eternity to make our anticipation of death out-balance our fear of its shadows. I know now what the minister meant."

The day died as they sat there, just as it had died one springtime years and years before. Robins called far across the valley where the sun shone in long slanting beams of gold. The hush of New England peace was upon the world and on the old Purse place and upon the woman's life.

"I guess — I'll go now, Mary," Herbert said clumsily as in days of yore.

"You'll come again and see me, Herbert. That at least would be a pleasant thing for both of us."

"Perhaps, Mary," he said. He started to go. Then he came back. "And there was a little black mare — Mon — Mon — Monday-Washin'," he said. "What ever became of Monday-Washin'?"

"She died of colic one night about twelve years ago, Herbert. But she had a good home to the last."

"I'm glad of that," he said with much of his old awkwardness. "Thank you, Mary."

"You'll come again and visit, Herbert?"

"Perhaps, Mary. Good-by."

"Good-by, Herbert."

She watched him shuffle across the yard and out under the hoary old maples. He went down the road and then he also vanished where so much in Mary's life had vanished — around the bend in the road by the sumachs.

Around the bend in the road by the sumachs, indeed !

Poor Herb ! He went around the bend by the sumachs and down the simple country road. And somewhere down near Simonds woods — because of the mental strain which the visit had made upon him, because of the reawakening of his mind, because, perhaps, of the old associations and all which they suddenly meant to him again — something happened in poor old Herb's head, and he fell in the road there and was found by old man Dickinson, driving out from the village later that night with the evening mail.

He was dead by the time that old man Dickinson got him to Doctor Johnson's.

All that night and the next day he lay in Blake Whipple's Undertaking Parlors with no one to mourn for him excepting a few poor old friends who shortly will be lying in Blake Whipple's parlors themselves, and who scarcely recognized in him the boy of the Long Ago — no one to care — only a frayed handful to come to the funeral.

The men and women of the village who had known him in the old days took up a purse to defray the expenses of that simple service and he was laid away beside his father and mother on the hill, — with Jack Purse sleeping through the years a few graves away under the briarbloom.

CHAPTER IV

IN WHICH THE LONG LANE OF LIFE TURNS SUDDENLY FOR MARY PURSE THROUGH GREEN PASTURES AND BESIDE STILL WATERS AND HER CUP OF LIFE'S HAPPINESS AND REWARD IS FILLED TO ITS BRIM.

THE summer and autumn passed. Then came an awful Vermont winter when Sam made his maiden sister go and live with Aunt Mary Purse to see that the old house on Cobb Hill saw no further tragedy. Spring came in again with its weeks of alternate slush and mud and pneumonia weather. Then one day before the mud was entirely dried or the first green shoots began poking through the fragrant sod, Sam at the exchange table was trying to think up a subject for an editorial, pawing idly amid the mass of newspapers, free magazines, political claptrap and press material which would later find its way into our wastebasket. His hand struck a long heavy periodical done in brown paper. When he drew it forth he saw it was addressed in a man's handwriting and that it bore a two-cent stamp.

Suddenly the editor's feet came down with a startled clump. He sat bolt upright, holding the open magazine in his hands. Then he crossed the floor, uttered an exclamation as he did so and laid the paper down on my desk.

"Bill!" he cried, laying it out flat, "look at the front cover and tell me whose picture that is!"

Know him? Of course I knew him. Small need to read the name beneath the picture.

"Why, it's Mary's boy," I said, and the book-keeper overheard and came running.

It was the current issue of a New York trade paper published for newspaper men that Sam had opened. There — occupying the whole of the front page — was a fine half-tone of Aunt Mary's oldest boy, — a strongfaced, clean-cut, fine-looking man. He had just been promoted to a position as leading editorial writer on one of the greatest newspapers in America.

"Turn to page seven, Mr. Hod!" begged the book-keeper. "See what its got to say inside about him."

We turned to the indicated page. There, as we expected, we found Tom Purse's biography, — Tom Purse who once washed the forms and swept out our little country office. Sure enough too, our little country paper was given full credit as being his kindergarten of journalism.

But that was not all.

The United States, at the time, was apparently becoming embroiled in diplomatic difficulty with Mexico. Force might have to be employed; it might mean war. The article went on to add that there was to be a great union meeting of three of the biggest New York churches in the immense Manhattan Tabernacle that following Sabbath evening and because of his tremendous editorial position, an invitation had been extended to this big newspaperman to preach the sermon. His acceptance had been recorded. His text was to be: "Jesus Christ, the King of the Nations."

"His mother — old Aunt Mary — ought to see this paper," I declared.

"Bill," said Sam thickly, "she ought to see the boy himself, risen to his power and his manhood. Don't you know it was her wish all along — a piteously disappointed wish — that one of her boys should turn out a preacher? Bill, Aunt Mary ought to hear Tom Purse address that massive congregation."

"And I wouldn't mind hearing him myself," I replied vehemently.

There was silence between us for a moment. It was the little bookkeeper who said:

"Wouldn't it be grand if Uncle Bill could take Aunt Mary down there somehow, telling her nothing about it, and get her into that building without ever knowing who the speaker was to be, and surprise her by seeing her son walk out and address that audience."

Sam Hod suddenly acted like a boy.

"Bill," he cried, "I've got an idea!"

"Yes?"

"Let's do a kindly act; for just once in our lives, let's do a kindly act!"

"Considering that for thirty-seven years we've been robbing widows and orphans, firing foundling asylums and kicking the crutches out from under cripples, let's have an explanation."

"I'm for giving Mary Purse a whale of a blow-out at the *Telegraph's* expense."

"A banquet?"

"No, you fat-head! A trip to New York — to hear her son deliver that address! You get her to do it, Bill. Here's where Aunt Mary, for the first time in her life, is going to be introduced to something beside worry and trouble and heartache." He took a quick turn up and down the office. "Bill," he declared, "I can't go myself on account of

Saunders coming down to-morrow on the annual paper contract. But you can go, Bill — you can go — and take Aunt Mary — and the paper will pay her expenses. Take her down to the Big City without saying one word to her of her boy's promotion or what they've asked him to do. Take her down and for once let the poor, starved, lonesome old soul get one final ray of sunshine into her overworked and spent and exhausted life."

Agreed? Of course we agreed. Acting on an impulse that was strange in Sam Hod, the editor flung himself into his chair, felt for his check book and wrote a good-sized check.

"Take your wife into it, Bill. Make her get Aunt Mary all the clothes she needs that her boys may have forgotten to provide for her; tell her you're going to New York on a business trip for the paper and there's a chance for her to visit her boy and his wife as an equal surprise to them. And we'll charge it up to profit and loss — but principally profit."

It took two days' effort on the part of my wife and myself to persuade Aunt Mary to accompany us on a trip to New York and incidentally "look in" on her son. I remember the first time I went out to talk with her about it, she was sitting in her rocker in the side room. I had the trade magazine with me, but we had carefully clipped out the note on the end of Tom's biography, telling about the address.

"Mary," I said, "they've printed Tom's picture in a New York paper."

Her wrinkled hand went to her lips.

"My stars!" she cried faintly. "Has he got in jail?"

"No such bad luck, Mary. Get your glasses and read this piece. And then Ann and I have got a plan for a good time to propose to you."

So it was that three days later Aunt Mary and my wife and I were being whirled through lower Connecticut in the chair car of a Pullman — the first one Mary had ever experienced — and that in the dusk we began to see the ten million lights of upper New York flash out in the twilight's dreariness. Three or four times during the ride Mary had choked up and wondered whether or not Tom's wife would be glad to see her, coming in unannounced in this way. But we reassured her and said that surprise parties were always happiest and studiously kept newspapers away from her so that no mention of the coming meeting might reach her.

It was a difficult task inventing excuses for not going immediately on our arrival to Tom Purse's residence over in Brooklyn. Finally we had to tell her that it was arranged for Tom to meet us that evening at the close of a big meeting in the Manhattan Tabernacle which he was covering for his paper. Which was the truth and satisfied her.

When we reached the place by taxi after supper, the place, despite its world-famous size, was crowded to the doors with people. Old Aunt Mary bore up well in the crowds; her anticipation of what was coming afterward was pathetic. We fought our way up four flights of stairs and came out on a great gallery with the whole vast sea of space below us thronged with chaotic human faces. Three unoccupied seats were obtained down by the rail in the center, on the sheer edge of the dizzy depths down into the body of the house.

Just before the great organ began to shake

that tremendous edifice, old Aunt Mary leaned over.

"Who's goin' to be the preacher to-night?" she whispered.

A flood of emotion went over us that nearly swept us over the rail. Poor Aunt Mary! If she only knew! But we had kept the secret well; the surprise would be overwhelming.

"Wait and see," was all we said.

We stole two or three glances at her while waiting for those services to begin. Her face was deep-lined with the care and the struggle she had experienced. Her red hands that had set so many personals for our little local paper were distorted out of shape with the years of labor; they were now covered with new black gloves. But she was gazing over the rail with the entranced delight of a child.

Time passed quickly. We had come in late. The biggest pipe organ in America — or in the world — began to rumble and fill that tremendous void with music.

Who the minister was who read the scripture or who the dignitary who made the prayer, we do not know. It doesn't matter. Neither did the leader of the music. But mightily interested indeed were we when three men mounted the chancel and took seats in the high-backed chairs behind the pulpit. For in the center of them, in a smooth, sleek, frock coat which fitted his stocky and somewhat youthful figure we had small difficulty in recognizing even from that height Thomas Purse of the *Paris Telegraph* office and the poor Purse Place.

It was after eight o'clock when one of the last three arose to announce the speaker for the evening.

Aunt Mary's eyesight had not been keen enough

to recognize Tom from the height and the distance as we had done. So she suddenly leaned over.

"What?" she demanded in a hoarse whisper. "What did he say the speaker's name was?"

"He said, Mary," I told her in a voice I did not recognize as my own, "he said the speaker of the evening was — Mr. — Thomas — Purse!"

"Why! — why — that's the name of my boy!" she gasped.

"Mary," we said, almost fearful of the result, "*that is — your — boy!*"

Old Aunt Mary drew back and for one long moment became rigid as though turned to stone.

"My boy — my boy Tom!" she cried. It was heard all over our part of the gallery. People craned their heads in our direction.

"Yes," I replied.

"He's — speaking — here — to-night? He's *preachin'?*"

"Yes, Mary. It was all a little surprise for you. That's why we brought you down. Hush! Tom, your boy Tom, is starting his address!"

Her boy!

Down there on the pinnacle, facing that gigantic sea of human faces, with the vast lights overhead, the vast balconies and galleries around, the great organ at his back, that stocky, well-dressed, fine-faced man down there on the pinnacle addressing this vast assemblage of people in strong, sure, steady statements was her boy!

Her gnarled, misshapen old hands, made only to do mother work and to hold a composing stick, gripped the railing. Her care-furrowed face looked down upon him transfixed. Her eyes were livid things.

Her boy !

Down there on the vast pinnacle, the center of that great throng, the focus of thousands of eyes — was Thomas Purse of the poor Purse Place, and all this crowd was there to hear him preach, — to hear her boy preach ! Down there was Thomas Purse, the boy and the man who had fought and conquered and won. Down there was the lad that by sheer merit and brains and the blood of his mother that was in him had pounded his way up until his voice and his pen were conceded to rank among those mightiest in the land. And he was her boy ! — and he was preaching !

It must have come to Aunt Mary, as she sat there in those next few moments of pitiful delirium, in another world, rigid and transfixed, what all those long years meant in the office of the little *Paris Daily Telegraph*. Long dreary days when she had looked forward into a cheerless future and done her task only one hour at a time for the sake of the doing and because of her mother-love which prompted the endeavor ; quiet evening hours when she had bent over a crib where a little boy cried, and said : “ You want your father, little lad ; and oh, dear God, I want him, too ” ; hours when she had worked into the dark and soundless midnights mending tiny little jackets, making tiny little clothes, sewing on little buttons, — while her tears blended with the stitches and she could not see her needle for them ; memories of the day when his father had died and she had accepted her lot with the noble philosophy that “ troubles are sent us to be overcome ” and “ we ’ ll get along somehow, I guess ”, which meant she would shoulder uncomplainingly the double burden ; monotonous, backbreaking

months and years when she had worked over a grimy type case for the sake of the food and the clothes and the taxes and the meager tuition which the resultant money could provide; days of agony, when she had watched the boys go out of sight around the bend in the road by the sumachs; lonely days when she had wandered through the rooms of the poor Purse place and fancied she saw little ghosts toddling about the legs of toy-scarred tables, — verily, indeed, all these must have come to Aunt Mary in that greatest of all moments, that wonderful, heart-pausing moment when she looked over the edge of the high balcony down on the black, stocky figure who was of the world and the world's business, yet was placing Jesus the Son of Mary, the Man of Sorrows, the greatest of all Statesmen, Christ the Master, forward as the great pattern on whose precepts governments of men must be built to weather the vicissitudes of ages and of peoples.

Her boy!

She had lain with her body wet with agony and heard his first wordless cries piercing the darkness of his new-born nights. She it had been who felt for him in that darkness and gathered him to her warm mother-breast. She had watched over him through hours of feverish childhood slumber. She had mended his tattered clothes in his young school-days; comforted him in his boyish sorrows; advised with him in his heartrending high-school love affairs; guided him as best she knew into ways that led to honor and uprightness, — as it was given her with her limited advantages to know.

He had finally left her, — as is the law of life and of species the wide world over through all ages that have ever been or will ever come. She had given

the best that was in her, and he had left her and gone out to take his place in the battle of life among men. But this was the glory of it: that he had not been untrue to her whom he had left in boyish thoughtlessness up in New England's bleak hours of twilight. He had fought a man's-sized fight and won his recognition. He was her son! And we know that in those moments when she watched him down before those thousands, Aunt Mary came into the blessing of her heritage through an emotion that is known by no other save the mother-heart. It was her great and all-consuming, all-alleviating, all-recompensing moment of power and glory, — the greater glory, — *the greatest glory*, of whose width and breadth and depth there is no telling.

When it was over we got her out of that place somehow and down those cursed flights of stairs. Out in the street, after the press of the throng and the excitement, the body that had given so much and spent so much, broke beneath the strain. She fainted. In a taxi we took her hurriedly to her hotel and summoned a physician.

Hours afterward the man of medicine called me aside.

"Has this woman any children or other relatives?" he asked.

We told him that she had.

"I advise you to call them," he said. "Somehow, all at once, her system has given out. It's a general breakdown and collapse. She may pull through it; she may go quietly and without any pain. Yes, get them here. Perhaps they will help her. It's a peculiar case. I don't understand it."

But we who remembered Mary Purse as she had come to work for us in the long ago, we who remembered the love-match with poor Jack Purse, we who remembered the young mother with the wistful face who had trundled babies past the Main Street shop windows, we who remembered the one who had driven her husband home that last night from Ezekial's and two weeks later buried him; we who remembered the mother in whose face as she took up her cross smilingly Sam had seen Jesus Christ, and who had watched one by one those she loved best on earth go down the road and become lost to view by the sumachs — we understood.

Aunt Mary had lived to realize that all her labors and sacrifices had not been in vain.

She had known the greater glory — the greatest glory.

And now she wanted to go and tell the man she had lost back over the years.

CHAPTER V

IN WHICH AT LAST WE COME TO KNOW WHAT IS
MEANT BY THE GREATER GLORY WHICH OFTEN
COMES TO WOMANKIND WHEN THE SUN OF LIFE
IS SETTING.

A DAY and a half later the Purse boys began arriving. There came a moment that evening that I can never, never forget.

On the rich bed lay the frail body of a broken-down old woman. She was sallow and spent and her life was ebbing. And about that bed stood six stalwart, full-grown, manly men, — strong men, men who were doing the work of the world, clean-cut, well-born, firm-jawed fellows.

First there was Tom, who stood at the head of the bed and held his mother's hand. Daily through his editorial page he spoke to a quarter million men and women and impressed great truths upon them with a prestige and power exerted by no pulpit.

Next came Fred, who occupied a chair in an agricultural university. He taught men how to grasp the great forces of nature provided by the Creator, and with aid from them bring forth scientifically the food wherewith to feed the race.

Beside him was Theodore, the man who wrestled with other forces of nature and subdued them and compelled them to do his bidding. He spanned streams for human commerce. He laid the rails that brought civilization into the far places. He

carried to success great irrigation projects so that water was brought to arid lands and the desert through his hand and brain was made to blossom like a rose.

On the other side of the bed were Richard and George and Dexter. Each man was on his way toward success. But most of all, they were first of all men, — resourceful, honest, forceful men, expending their lives and their talents for the betterment of the race.

And there on the bed, broken and frail and worn-out and old, lay the one to whom they owed their being. From her loins they had sprung; from her travail they had felt that first sharp sting of life in their nostrils, by her ministrations they had been nurtured into mature life until they stood — the completed product of woman and the Almighty.

She was only a poor old woman, spent and worn and almost done with life. But she was not a failure. No woman who raises one child — or a dozen — and spends her life to bring other lives to maturity and into the image of the Creator — no such woman is a failure, regardless how humble may have been her lot or dark and cruel the pathway she has trodden.

At length the boys withdrew into Dexter's bedroom across the hall. In silence, with looks sheepish and ashamed, they grouped themselves in different attitudes about their eldest brother. At length that eldest brother spoke. His voice was husky.

"A grateful bunch of fat-heads we six are, aren't we?"

"What do you mean, 'grateful'?"

"How long since you wrote mother last or sent her any money?"

"A couple of months, I guess."

"A couple of months! Sufferin' Moses! Call yourself a son. Bah!"

"How long since you did?"

"Three months," replied Tom honestly.

"Call yourself a son?" mimicked George.

"No; a skunk!" said the eldest son, equally honest.

In his slow, thoughtful, precise way, Frederick spoke up.

"I guess it hasn't been that we think any less of mother or were ungrateful. But mother's always appeared so self-reliant and self-supporting and efficient that it's never come home to us hard enough that she was human and could grow old and get played out. I don't know as I ever gave it much thought."

"To say nothing," added George, "of being so blooming concentrated in making good at our jobs that we hadn't much time to give to associations of the past."

Silence, scowls, much drumming on table tops with finger tips. Richard bit the tip off a cigar savagely.

"My God, fellows," cried Tom, "mother's fifty-seven; fifty-seven only; and she's old! She looks seventy. We're a bunch of cads, the whole kiboodle of us. Dammit!"

The brothers took the censure without protest.

"What's her life been?" demanded Tom. "She came off the farm and married dad. And they were poorer than scrub whites and had to furnish their home on instalments. She had this holy-rolling bunch of roughnecks one by one that tied her down and took away her looks and her womanhood and made her old even before dad died. And then she

lost him. We are old enough now to realize what she faced, the morning she returned to her place in the newspaper office to fight the battle of life for thoughtless scum like ourselves. And think of the stunt she's put over since! Boys, does it strike you that this is the first time to our knowledge that mother's been to New York in her life?"

"Go on! — rub it in!" prompted Ted.

"Fellows," concluded Tom quickly because he could not go on, "it's up to us to see that she spends the rest of her days in joy-riding. It's up to us to help her make up for lost time."

"How?"

"Here's my share: A week ago the paper wanted to send me to Europe to get a line on international politics. I turned it down because Lily couldn't leave her crippled sister. I had no heart to go alone. The paper's sending Higgins. But here's where Higgins gets a disappointment. I'm going to Europe — and by God, mother's going with me!"

"At her age?"

"What about her age? She's only fifty-seven. All mother wants is a resting spell — and a chance to come back."

"Go in and tell her so," ordered George. "Maybe it'll help her to recover."

Tom left the room to talk it over with his mother. As he closed the door behind him, he came face to face with a strange woman. She was dressed in a long heavy coat and a hat of gorgeous red plush. Her features were burned out and old, her eyes tired. Something ailed her lips; she could not speak distinctly.

"I'm looking for two-fifty-seven," she said.

"What do you want with two-fifty-seven?"

"I just heard a story up in Manhattan Tabernacle that Tom Purse's mother was in the crowd there the other night and fainted. A policeman told me she was brought here."

"She was. But you can't see her."

"But I must see her."

"Who are you?"

She told him, but the name made little or no impression on him. "I knew your mother when we were girls up in Vermont together. We were chums, she and I," said the woman.

"What do you want with my mother just now?"

"I want to visit her. I want to tell her something."

"You can't do it; she's ill!" said the son determinedly.

"Badly ill?"

"Yes."

"She's — liable — to — die?"

"Yes."

The woman's eyes stared at him blankly for a moment. Her crippled lips formed a small round "O." "She oughtn't to die without knowing."

"Knowing what?"

"I couldn't explain so you'd appreciate. Listen! Will she live through the night?"

"We — hope — so!"

The woman backed away, turned, started swiftly for the elevator. "I'll be back!" she called. "I must go to my apartment."

Tom went in to his mother.

Half an hour later came a tap at the door. The nurse answered the summons.

"There's a woman out here says she must see you, Mr. Purse."

Tom went out. The woman with the red plush hat was there again.

"Is she any better, Mr. Purse?"

"A bit — yes."

"But I can't see her?"

"No."

"If she wakes up and recognizes things, will you give her this note?"

"Perhaps. It depends on her condition. What's in it?"

"I heard your speech. It's sort of a surrender."

"My speech?"

"No; this note."

The nurse called to him. "Your mother's whispering your name, Mr. Purse. You'd better come."

Tom thrust the big square envelope into his pocket where it crumpled and was immediately forgotten.

The woman in the red plush hat avoided the elevator. She went slowly down the stairs, — as one who had been cast out.

The woman in the red plush hat, with the tired eyes, walked the hard pavements in the cold spring rain. The rain in the country is sweet and sad. It awakens a hundred fragrant odors from shrubs and sod. But the rain in the city is raw and heartless and spatters down like a curse and a scourge, a reproof from the Creator that the cities are foul and an abomination unto Him.

The woman walked the streets of the city beneath this rain that was slowly bedraggling the hat and the iron-gray hair. At length she came to an eating — and drinking — place that she knew and she turned

inside. And as she turned inside, a moth-eaten little poodle of a man who had been standing in a near-by doorway, recognized her and trotted after to overtake her. He went inside also and smirked at her. Half-apologetically, he fidgeted himself about until she noticed him.

"Hello, Georgie! You following me 'round again? Come on in and have something, George. Come and keep me company because I wish I was dead."

It was just what the little poodle of a man had wildly hoped for. Maybe if Mibb imbibed the appropriate number of drinks she would become generous as she had at sundry times in the past, and loan him five so he could go back and get another week's bed and board.

"Lost yer job, Mibb?" asked the threadbare little man. He sat opposite her, his little rounded shoulders hunched up, his thumbs together on the table's edge, in his buttonhole a wilted, ragged nosegay.

"No; something worse than my job, George."

"What could be worse'n your job to lose, Mibb?"

"My soul, George, my soul, my soul!"

He looked at Mibb, trying to get his cue. Was she facetious or already intoxicated or was she in earnest? He concluded she was indulging in grim jest.

"And when did you lose this soul o' your'n, Mibb?"

"Years and years ago, George. Years and years ago when I was young and handsome."

George smirked.

"You're pretty and handsome now, Mibb." Thus did he hope to wheedle the five.

"Pretty and handsome? Don't be an ass, George. I'm not in the mood for it to-night."

"If you ain't pretty and handsome, what are you?"

"I'm a greasy, burned out, old woman with a heart like a peanut and a face that shows plainly enough she's gone the pace and is paying the price. That's what I am!"

"You're a woman —" began George.

"I'm not a woman — I'm only female. Maybe I showed some traces of being a woman once. Maybe I could have become a woman if I'd had a better bringing up and not been so God-damned selfish. But I bungled the job of life and I see it now and I think I'm going to get — drunk. If you don't want to miss it, sit where you are, George, and watch me ossify!"

"But Mabel, my dear!"

"Don't 'dear' me! You want something out of me. Nobody ever dears a selfish woman unless they want favors. There's going to be a funeral here, George. I know a woman who's goin' to bury her sorrows and heartache in booze. Hold a coffin handle, George. It will be entertaining!"

"But, Mabel; really, you mustn't, you know. You'll lose your job —"

"Lose my job! And what o' that? What's the loss of a job beside the things I've lost? —"

"What have you lost, especially, Mabel?"

"What have I lost — especially? Listen, I'll tell you what I've lost especially. I've lost my girlhood and my future; I've lost the regard of respectable people and a birthright of honor. I've lost the love of one of the finest men God ever made, sort of a silly grinning fellow but with a heart as good as gold and out of whom I could have made a man, and a

husband who'd be with me now and make my last days happy. I've lost a fine home and friends and the things that money can't buy, and I've lost a fortune also. I've lost baby arms around my neck and damp baby kisses on my lips. I've lost the blessings of little children growing up around me, George! and the joy of caressing their bumps and softening their tragedies and healing their bruises. I've lost — God! — what haven't I lost! — I've lost the glory of reaching times that I've reached now, to-night, and not a single man to tower over my shoulder and call me — mother — and stand around with his brothers beside my bed and pray to God, if there is one, that my life may be spared for the sake of what I mean to some one. That's what I've lost, ee-specially, George, and I only want to forget my troubles and be carried back in fancy to my girlhood in a little New England town again!"

The waiter came up. Mibb ordered wine. George raised his stubby little hands to protest. But a bit hysterically she laughed him down.

"And why have I lost it, George — why have I lost all those things? I'll tell you, George. Because I was too damned afraid that I'd do somethin' for other folks that'd interfere with my blessed happiness or spoil my shape. Because I was brought up by a hellion that should have been covered with black blotches from a harness tug for teaching me that a woman's place in life was to go around with a stuffed club in her skirts loaded to the point of explosion because some man might be treadin' on her rights. By God! Rights! All the rights most of the women nowadays need is the right to have their hearts broken and their souls all mangled and cut up so's they can know the meaning of fellow feeling and home love and

sympathy. Because when a woman's a woman first and other things afterward, George, she doesn't need to worry none about her rights. She'll get her rights, all right, without hiring any halls or buying any brass bands or breaking up homes or going out and grabbing a man's pay envelope!"

The waiter came with the drinks and Mibb took three at once. Promptly she became still more hysterical.

"Look at me, George! You'd never think I'd ever have been a famous lady, would you, George? You'd never think I'd come from a sweet, pure, little town up in the hills of New England and been married to a good man with money enough once to buy this street? You'd never think I'd had a home with fourteen rooms and three baths and a lawn where you could hold a moving-picture carnival? Never think I'd been to Europe four times and spent more money on jewelry in a week than I'll earn now for the rest of my life? Never think all those things, would you, George? I'm a beauty now, ain't I George? I've a face like a pan of dough and a shape like a bundle of iniquity! I've got a home that stinks of straw matting and slops, and jewelry now that Woolworth lays in by the ton. I've got all the happiness out of life that life has to give, excepting the happiness that comes from sacrifice and repression and generosity. I've been thirty years carefully avoiding the unpleasant things in life — and met suddenly the brink of the precipice that yawns down into the chasms of abandon!"

The frayed poodle watched her furtively; he began to dismiss thoughts of getting that five with Mibb in such a state and momentarily growing worse.

"It's all right to have a good time while you're

young, George! It's smart to call the girls who marry for love and settle down quietly into homes 'slow', and laugh at them for being content to struggle on with only fifteen a week in the man's envelope. It's quite the proper thing to avoid having babies and keeping your figure and follow the styles and live generally on the upper crust while others are growing careworn and anxious-eyed with the struggle and the worry. It's all right — for a time, George! But it's all a mess of tinsel and mummery and a bad taste in your mouth, the morning after, George. There's old age to be reckoned with; there's time to be taken into consideration. And time asks its pound of flesh and the years find your pals all gone. And the nights are quiet and lonely, George, and the days drag by in a mockery. Oh, God! God! God! I'd give more for one racked, twisted, furrowed-faced, gnarled-fingered, sock-darnin', food-cookin', hymn-singin' old woman reachin' the Empty Years at last but with her brats grown up around her into strong men and gentle women, than all the silver-slippered, low-necked, fizzle-headed sissies you can find from Grant's Tomb to Bowlin' Green!"

"Don't, Mibb. You're crossin' your drinks bad, by orderin' that."

"Let me alone, George! I know what I'm doin'. About thirty years ago to-night, it was, I made a bet with Mary Purse that I'd beat her hands down at the game of matrimony when each of us were fifty-seven. I made that bet, George. But I've lost it. I've had my fling, George. I've had my 'rights.' I've been entitled to live my own life in my own way and I've done it. And it's gall in my heart, George, — it's wormwood in my soul!"

Her voice had become high and wild. People

turned and stared. George saw his opportunity was lost and slipped away. At the cashier's desk a man summoned a burly waiter.

"That's enough of that, over there at the corner table. This is a respectable place, Zelf!"

"It's a down-and-outer trying to tell the world the sad story of her past life."

"Go over and tell her to take a walk."

The waiter came across to Mabel. He said harsh things to her; he made it all too plain how undesirable was her patronage.

"I know, I know," she said brokenly, wearily. And her hard, lined, worldly face was wet with tears. "I've got a little money left. I'll go back to Paris to-night."

The waiter scratched his head when she had gone out, rather unsteadily, a wandering, lone, ageing, broken, pathetic figure.

"Now what did she mean by Paris, to-night?" he demanded. "She ain't no Frenchie; I'll bet my envelope upon it!"

CHAPTER VI

IN WHICH AN ANGEL HOVERS AWHILE OVER EARTH
AND BEHOLDS A STRANGE SIGHT AND SIGHS AND
THEN GOES ON AGAIN ABOUT ITS BUSINESS.

BUT there were many weeks before she came back to Paris.

Mibb Henderson alighted on our station platform from the four o'clock train which had brought her up the valley. She had made the trip in a day-coach : her only baggage was a small black valise.

No one recognized her ; few indeed there are among present-day Parisians who have lived long enough in one place, in this one town, to know the prodigals when they return. Uncle Joe Fodder, driving his depot hack, knew. Perhaps for that reason she avoided him. She did not take a carriage up to the business section. She walked up slowly, as though at last there were no need for hurry, — no need for hurry ever again. She had no place to reach. She had just — come home.

She was still stylishly dressed. The smart hat concealed the iron-gray hair. The modish veil with its field of black polka-dots hid the telltale wrinkles and traces of cosmetics. She was yet a well-built woman and indeed would pass as far younger than the Paris of yesteryear knew her to be. But Mibb was old ; somehow as she walked up Depot Street to Main she was broken and burned out and bowed. She made a pathetic figure as she came up Depot Street in the soft afternoon of a late spring.

When she got up to Main Street she stopped frequently on the corners as though undecided where to go or what to do. Reaching the taxi stand in front of Joe Farrell's quick lunch and finding a driver whose face was strange, she suffered him to put her bag in his machine and she climbed in the back under the auto top which partly hid her identity from those who might recognize her. A few years before there would have been no such attempt to keep her visit private. She would have gone up Main Street as Uncle Joe Fodder had once expressed it, "with all the pomp and importance of a fat wash-lady in the back seat of a new Ford." But Mibb's star had set now. And Mibb knew that it had set. All she wanted was to flee away to a quiet place somewhere like a tired and perhaps wounded animal; let nature heal those wounds. Yes, Mibb was very tired. Pitiful was her soul's yearning for Alsatia.

"Where to?" asked the chauffeur.

"Take me out to the Purse Place on Cobb Hill."

The driver started his engine and Mibb went through town with no one to see; no one to care.

The car was but a few moments covering the ground that in a far-off happier year had seemed an afternoon's journey to reach. How small and scrubby the little town was, after all!

It turned around the corner by the bridge; it climbed the long, sandy grade; the raspberry and blackberry vines brushed its dusty sides as it skirted the road along the stone wall banked with birches and dwarf willows and sumach, and hiding the poor Purse Place from sight. With dexterous twist it headed up into the yard with its short-cropped grass, behind the old stone wall where the sweep had once stood but banked now by the fragrant lilacs and

shrubbery of the wild roses, the yard where there were no farm implements lying around and where a fence rail was wedged firmly against the rusty red doors of an empty barn.

She alighted from the car. It waited for her with its engine running. She went up the two brown flag steps and knocked on the panels.

The raps of her knuckles sounded like thumps on a coffin. She tried the split and shriven door. It was locked.

"I guess — there's no one home," she faltered.

No one home indeed. Poor Mibb!

"I could o' told you that in the first place," replied the driver. "I didn't know but what you'd bought the place, or somethin'; that's why I didn't say nuthin'."

"Doesn't Mrs. Purse live here any longer? She isn't dead?"

"Naw; she held an auction last week and went to live with Aunt Julia Farrington down in the village."

Mibb swayed wearily on the doorstep.

"Take my bag and leave it at the Whitney House. How much do I owe you? I'll walk back."

She paid her tariff. The car backed out and headed for the village. When the soft chuf-chuf-chuf of its engine had grown fainter and fainter until it died away to nothing, she was alone out there in front of the abandoned house in the long slanting hours of closing day. Somehow she felt as if she had been abandoned too, like the old place brooding now in the sinking sun.

After a while she walked slowly from the yard. Her loneliness seemed greater than it had ever seemed before, — not to find Mary Purse in the old Purse Place.

She started slowly down the hill. Baker's meadow over the way that used to be the finest mowing anywhere around Paris, was not coming up virile and green. The grass was red and thin and sickly and filled with devil's paintbrush. The old Squire's place was gone; two hoary elm trees, green with scale, stood sentinel now over a cellar hole and heaps of senile yellow brick and stumps of a fireplace; the Squire's house burned down in the winter of '97. The grove of chestnut trees in Cogswell's pasture had been cut down these many years and likewise had the big beechnut tree gone from the eastern end of the bridge. And the bridge itself was no longer the picturesque covered affair of thirty-odd years before. It was a trim business-like affair of white iron thrown across the stream in nineteen hundred after the freshet of the previous winter had made the old one dangerous.

"Oh, it's changed so; it's — all — changed — so! If it wasn't for the old Purse Place and the hills, I'd hardly know it was the same," she said.

She crossed the bridge with a heavy heart. The location at the eastern end of Main Street where once her father's house had stood had been absorbed for ten years by the increasing areas of the Process works.

"Thank God that's gone!" she whispered. "I could have stood most anything but to see the old place again as it used to be when I was happy at home with Ma and the boarders!"

She finally reached the point where Pine Street bisects Main. At the southern end of Pine Street there is a little slope that comes out overlooking the river. On this stretch between road and river on the southeast corner of the village, there is a little

plot of grass-choked land we've come to call "the cemetery on the hill."

Something turned Mibb's steps that way. She had nowhere else to go. Why not up into the graveyard where lay sleeping the loved ones of other years?

A beautiful afterglow was over the world as she entered the cemetery and moved down among the graves. Half-fearfully she searched the tombstones, yet morbidly hungry for what they might disclose.

She came on her father's and mother's grave so suddenly that the bold inscriptions of the familiar name startled her. It was marked by a small white shaft of granite with the one word "Henderson" upon the base. On one side was a headstone with her father's name. On the opposite side her mother's.

"Poor pa and ma," she thought. "Even in death something had to divide you, didn't it, even if it's only the monument." But strange to say she did not feel so badly over the sight of those graves as she did over those friends of her carefree girlhood who had been her boon companions. And when this realization came to her, came also the words of Dick Robinson a few months before, about her mother's lack of maternity which had been partly responsible for the woman she had grown to be. And for a moment a fierce wild hatred filled her.

But the resentment left her when gazing over behind her family plot, and off to the left, she saw a last year's grave with a brand new headstone that stuck out among the lazy sleepy old stones like a mansion among the dwellings of paupers. She drew near fearfully and read:

HERBERT PEASE TRUMAN

Beloved Son and Husband

Departed this Life

In the Fifty-eighth

Year of His Age

Beloved son and husband! Beloved son and husband!

"Gone, gone, they're all gone, — those that might have cared for me," she cried softly and brokenly. "And those that haven't gone, those that are living, they do not — cannot — care! Oh the bitterness of it!"

Upon the grave of her husband chance had deposited an old tin can, battered and rusty and profane. With a choke in her throat Mibb leaned tenderly over. She lifted it away. She was about to cast the thing of desecration from her when she paused. The receptacle was half filled with rain water.

"Herbert! Herbert! Herbert! I killed you; I know I killed you! I killed you as sure as though I had run a knife in your heart. But I am sorry, Herbert! And if I could go back, be with you just through one evening again, I'd take you into my starved and lonely and foolish soul in a way that would make you a man! Beloved husband? Yes, Herbert, yes!"

She crossed over to the near-by stone wall. A clump of wild roses was growing there. Carefully, tearfully, she gathered a handful of the limp sweet flowers, and carried them back. Then with a tenderness she had never employed in doing any other earthly thing, she settled the offering on the husband's grave.

And an angel, wafting its way with wings as soft as air, over that acre of the dead on that peaceful Spring twilight, saw the thing that Mibb Truman did. There came a soft glow in the angel's heart and a well of tears to his eyes. For he knew that the thing Mibb did was from a broken and repentant heart, with no one around to see, no one to know, because she had lived and lost and come at last to know the fullness of love.

One lone robin came with shrill chirps out of the sunset and fluttered for a moment in a tall elm tree that grew just over the spilled stone wall. And as she stood there at the foot of her cross, the robin broke into song.

Far away down in the next mowing another bird answered.

The angel winged away to carry a report to heaven, leaving the two robins peacefully singing their vespers.

CHAPTER VII

A SORT OF GRADUATION CHAPTER IN WHICH THE MEDAL OF HONOR IS AWARDED AND A LONELY WOMAN'S TEARS CARRY HER NEAR TO GOD.

DOUBTLESS it was our report of what had taken place in New York that turned Sam's thoughts backward that sunset as he stood that balmy spring evening by his open window.

"Thirty years ago it took place," he said. "To think of it!"

A hush of infinite peace hung over our valley. The screaming color of the west that set a thousand western windows aflame, was gradually softening. It was Wanderlust time, that period of the year when the grass has come green again and the faint odor of damp lilacs births sensations in the heart of a man that are sweet and wild and sad.

"I haven't been up there in ten years," he said. "I'm going to walk up to the old cabin to-night and see what's left."

In the cool of the evening the editor whose temples were now gray, wended his steps out School Street and along by the gas works; beyond the gas works to the county farm; beyond the county farm to the East Wickford road; along the East Wickford road; to the turning-off place up into Gold-Piece Blaisdell's Glen.

As he walked he could not avoid the memory of

how he had taken that pathway in other years, nor those who walked with him who had gone.

A thousand country scents of sweet-fern and briar bloom and blossoming laurel, of blackberry vine and checkerberry and wild apple, assailed his senses as he walked along. And the odors which he had forgotten to notice since he became a man, with the cares and responsibilities and problems of a man, brought back to him now old voices and old faces, old trysts and old happinesses. For a moment he almost turned back, so badly did the pain of memory hurt him. But he was so near now that it was foolish to turn back. Through the raspberry vine that scratched his trousers and the milkweed that left lint upon him, through the grasses that were damp and wetted his shoes, through the little swarms of evening insects that lifted and fell in the evening air, he went forward.

"The brush has grown up high," he said. "The path is almost gone."

The Glen was darkened when at last he left the tall rank grass and undergrowth and saw before him the ghostly outlines of the cabin.

"It's not fallen in yet," he observed. "But how hoary and grizzled everything seems."

He surveyed the dilapidated old cabin for a long time before venturing near. It had been a well-built cabin. The hemlock logs had stood the frosts of winter and the rains of summer. The roof was fallen in at a corner; the windows were gone. Half the chimney had been carried down and the door hung by a rusty hinge. Everywhere were the marks of the sharp teeth of the hedgehogs. But still it was the same old structure around whose fireplace those companions had gathered after that tired day back

over the years. And a choke came in the editor's throat and a nameless hunger grew deep and mangling in his heart.

Then as he stood there looking at it, he saw a ghost ! The ghost of Mibb Henderson stepped from that doorway, not the Mibb of that far-away holiday — but a Mibb whose face was furrowed with sorrow, whose hair was iron gray.

He wanted to run. He wanted to cry out. But he stood rooted to the spot in terror.

And the ghost of Mibb Henderson spoke to him.

"Sam," it cried, "Sam Hod ! Oh, Gawd ! Is it you, Sam ? Is it you ?"

"Yes, — it's me, Mibb," he replied in a voice he did not recognize as his.

"Oh, Sam, I'm glad you've come ; I couldn't go back alone. I'd have given out along the way."

And Sam saw it was not Mibb's ghost. It was Mibb Henderson herself and she was just a broken-down, sorrow-laden, repentant and suffering old woman, — suffering with memories as he was suffering.

"Why did you come up here, Mibb ?" he asked.

"I had to come, Sam. I had to come."

"So did I," he said.

After a time he found himself in the cabin with her.

"Let's light a fire, Mibb," he said. "Let's light a fire from the rubbish and see how the old place looks."

Deer hunters who had probably occupied the place the season before had left ample wood piled beside the fireplace. There were old papers scattered about. It was the work of a moment for Sam to make a place in the cold dead ashes. He touched a match to the

paper under the wood which he had piled. It burned blue at first and then blazed up.

A few minutes after the cabin was warm and filled with weird and rosy light. Silently he swung a box over, and Mibb, gathering her noisy silken underskirts about her ankles, sat down upon it. He found a similar box for himself. He poked the fire once or twice. It made queer shadows of the two on the wall behind; queerer shadows of the cuts and jogs and corners.

"How long has it been, Mibb; thirty years ago?"

"Thirty years ago," she said in a whisper; "thirty years ago to-night."

"To-night!"

She looked at him in sad surprise.

"Surely to-night," she confirmed. "Why, that's why I came! Didn't you?"

"I'd forgotten just what month and day it was, Mibb. I only remember it was in the late spring. We were on a picnic in return for the play we gave that year at the Opera House!"

"They sat over there on that wall settle, in the shadow, afterward. It's there yet! I can see them, Mibb —" The editor's voice wavered.

"And Harriet is dead these eleven years!"

"And Dick? The last I heard of him he was richer than Croesus and lonelier than Job in his affliction, living down in Boston —" Mabel shut her lips suddenly hard, pitifully hard.

Silence for a time. The fire crackled and blazed and drove the damp from the musty old place. Sam poked it with his crooked stick to give his hands something to do.

"And I sat about where you're sitting," Mibb

went on. "I was on the floor with my head against Herb's knees!"

More silence; longer silence this time.

"I saw Dick Robinson the other night," declared the woman. "He cleaned up a million, looks like a matinee idol, and — and — he's a woman-hater." She laughed a trifle bitterly.

"Folks around here said you were going to marry him a while ago, Mibb."

"I'm not worthy of him; I'm not worthy of any man, Sam. That's why the wedding was called off."

Sam raised his heavy brows quickly in surprise. This was surely a different Mibb from the old days, a Mibb who would declare herself unworthy of a man, any man. But he said nothing.

"And you, Sam, I can see you and Alice leaning against the masonry there on the left corner. Have you ever stopped to think, Sam, that you and Alice were the only two out of all that crowd who married and lived happily ever since."

"There was — there was — Jack and Mary Purse," suggested the editor.

"Don't let's talk about them, Sam; it hurts."

After a time Sam said:

"Thirteen young folks, typically American young folks, on a soft spring night, off in the woods after May flowers. They group around it, lovers and sweethearts, and they sing old love songs and tell yarns and watch the pictures in the flames.

"And the talk drifts around to the happiness of the moment, of the threshold of life where they all stand, healthy young mortals, rejoicing in their youth and strength as a strong man to run a race. And laughingly one takes a gold piece from his pocket and makes a proposition: They are to bury the

gold piece beneath the hearthstone, miser-fashion. Through the years of their life-endavor it is to lie there. And when thirty years have flown, if they be alive, they are to dig that coin up — and it is to be medal of honor for the one who has made his life the most successful.”

Again the woman shivered. But it was not cold. The editor went on :

“We won’t go through the careers of those thirteen young folks; we know them too well, Mibb. But thirty years have flown, six of those boys and girls have gone to their graves. Of the seven living, two have amassed fortunes — ”

“Which isn’t the measure of success at all, Sam.”

“You thought it was once, Mibb.”

“I’ve learned differently, Sam,” she replied quietly.

“Then you think they can be eliminated?”

“They can be eliminated,” she said sadly.

Sam poked the fire several times.

“Mibb,” he said softly at length, “tell me, to whom does the medal of honor belong?”

She turned her worn countenance to him then. In a soft, soft voice she said :

“I think we know — to whom it belongs, Sam.”

The editor felt in his pocket for a cigar. He lighted it in an ocean of time. He got it going comfortably. He took it from his mouth and studied its ash.

“I think we do,” he said.

“Shall we dig it up, Mibb?” he asked.

“I don’t suppose any one ever will, if we do not.”

Sam Hod produced his penknife. He dug away the dirt by the light of the dying flames.

“It is here, Mibb,” he said reverently.

Under the hearth brick was found the cavity. In the cavity lay Dick Robinson's match-safe. Thirty years it had laid in that box that was eaten with rust. For when Sam shook it, the tinkle came inside it.

"Sam!" cried the woman with a sob, "oh, Sam, we've committed a sacrilege!"

The woman broke down and sobbed.

They went home under the soft spring moonlight. It seemed strange to think, as they quitted that glen, that the same moon had lighted the way of that happy, carefree, light hearted party thirty years before. They went home in silence, the man helping the woman over the difficult places. They went out of the Glen, out of the trysting place of other, better and brighter and happier days, back along the country road and the brook and the streets into town.

"To think, Mibb," said Sam when they were almost up in the business section again, "that you and I, out of all that party, should be the ones to dig up that gold piece."

The woman did not reply. Her heart was too full.

"I'll give it to her, to-night, Sam," she promised. "I'm going up there, now. I've got to go. I've got to see Mary. Sam — Sam — my heart is broken. And I've got to let Mary know that it's broken."

The editor understood.

"Good night, Mibb," he said. "And perhaps it would help you a little bit to know that I don't think half as much ill of you, after being up there in that cabin with you, as I might have thought if I had not seen — what I have."

"Good night," she whispered.

The editor went into his office.

The woman went over to the hotel and got the bag

that had been left there. Then she went to Aunt Julia Farrington's house which she knew so well, at the corner of Pine and Walnut streets, — the house that looked like a picture out of yesterday with its iron fences and old-fashioned posy beds and terra cotta statue in the yard.

There was a light burning in the hall as Mibb went up. She pulled the old-fashioned bell and waited.

Aunt Mary Purse herself answered that bell. She came to the door with a red-yarn shawl over her frail shoulders. She had been packing for the epochal trip abroad on the coming Thursday with her son.

"Mary, Mary Purse, can I come in?" begged the woman outside in the dark. "It's me, Mary; it's Mabel Henderson."

A quarter-hour later they sat in the little front parlor of the Farrington home, the parlor with its antique melodeon and its whatnot filled with Aunt Julia's daguerreotypes, and its life-sized picture of Abraham Lincoln and with John Farrington's big cavalry sword standing in a corner.

Mary Purse, only five years the older but looking twenty, sat in a round-backed horsehair chair. On the floor at her feet with her poor, addled, weary head on the older woman's lap, sat Mibb Henderson, the girl who would "take her chances" with riches. And she was sobbing out her heart. As that great emotion possessed her, the gnarled beautiful hands of our lady compositor of years in the *Telegraph* office smoothed her hair and soothed her feverish forehead.

"Oh, if you only hated me, Mary," she moaned, "if you'd only fought me, damned me, killed me, if you'd even rebuked me one little bit, it would have been so much easier to bear now. But you took it

sweetly and nobly and bore it somehow; and you never held it against me. You never let it show when I came around so snippily, throwing your poverty in your face; taunting you with the load you were under; showing how base and contemptible I was and how low I had fallen. If you'd only done it, Mary, if you only had!"

"I couldn't, Mibb," Aunt Mary said. "I knew you couldn't help it. You didn't do it to be mean; you were thoughtless, that's all. There's lots of thoughtless folks in the world, Mibb. We want to be patient with 'em and help 'em; most of 'em see their errors in time and so it all comes out right in the end."

Dumbly, piteously the woman of the world who had lost her moorings at last clung to the other as the only Alsatia to which to bring her tired soul. And true to the great noble woman soul and the mother-heart that was in her and the saint her troubles and struggles had made her, she found that sister ready and willing to forgive and help and comfort and inspire and smooth away all care. Freely the Henderson woman's tears flowed, and by those tears got as near to God as it was possible for her to get in earthly life.

Aunt Mary forgave her; forgave her for the cruel jests and stabbing taunts; forgave her for flaunting the prostituted finery before her when her heart was breaking with her poverty and load; forgave her for all of these and took her in and fed her soul with kindness and wrapped her in her great big mother-heart of eternal sympathy, — which is the blessedness of womankind above all other divinity, and which is the high road to peace.

Verily Aunt Mary Purse deserved the gold piece. We think so.

CHAPTER VIII

A GREAT SHIP STEALS OUT OF A HARBOR AND OVER THE SKYLINE, OUT OF THE HOMELAND AND INTO THE SOUL.

FOR thirty-five years now, we have published this little local paper. Perhaps we may be spared to keep it going for another quarter-century; such things have happened. Or perhaps just to-morrow, as we sit writing our briefs and our editorials, our four and five-line bits of pabulum about the out-of-town visitors with us, the sales of new automobiles, the recoveries from the sick list, who has a newly painted fence and who drove into town yesterday with a load of potatoes — anything and everything which will put people's names in print, and please them and make them buy copies so we can sell our advertising space — perhaps a soft hand will be laid on our shoulders, we may look up a trifle bewilderedly to see who stands there; and we may behold a stranger, — yet a stranger who knows us well, who has come to guide us to the land of our missing children, who shall stoop over, take our blue pencil, write "Thirty" beneath the items of the page on which we are working, and bid us follow.

When that time comes we shall not be afraid to go, we say, because we have seen God in the faces and souls of the ordinary men and women about us. Although the curriculum of our earthly education has been a mystery at times and in many strange

turnings in the long lane of living, although we have grieved often at the pined skein we have made of our lives because we have not been given to see the reason for the apparent snarl and tangle of it all, we think how weary God must be looking down on the world and watching the iniquities of those whose education is yet incomplete, and we are cheered and at peace. For if the Almighty has the patience and the optimism to keep the old world going in spite of the grievous short-comings of many folk in many places, things are not so bad as they seem and all must be well with most of us in the end.

True to his agreement, Tom Purse did take his mother away for a rest, — a rest that meant more than a cessation of bodily labor. It was a rest of the soul and the spirit in the companionship of the man-child she had reared, which companionship in the struggle of life thus far had somehow been denied her.

When she had recovered and was strong again, it was Fred who arranged the finances; the sons who had been only human in forgetting the loneliness of the mother-heart who had given so much for them, saw her start off with Tom. Though in years it was but a short time ago, yet it was in those far-off pleasant ages before the scourge of war had blighted the world, that Tom started with his mother on her great vacation to those far-away lands that only exist for most New England mothers in books or dreams.

There came a morning when Aunt Mary was helped by her son across the gangplank of a great steamship. The last good-bys were said by the boys who were all there to see her off. The smallest details had been arranged. Nothing lay ahead but the unspoiled

Wonderland of the Old World. Nothing lay ahead to the woman who had once been little Mary Wood and married a poor printer for love, but reward for the things she had gone through, — reward and enjoyment.

At noon, amid indescribable confusion, the boarding of the last luggage and freight to the weird songs of the stevedores, the blowing of many whistles and the last leave-takings, the hatches were finally swung into place, the gangplanks hoisted and the hawsers drawn on board. Slowly the little tugs pulled the great lazy monster from its stall in the city, awoke her from her two-weeks slumber, swung her about and faced her toward the deep blue distance. The wharf, with the faces of those Aunt Mary loved and was leaving behind just for a little time, dwindled to an indistinct strip of wooden roofed confusion. The great boat floated farther and farther away from the strip of smiles and waving handkerchiefs and tears.

For the first time Aunt Mary saw Dame Liberty on her island in the harbor, — that iron woman holding her torch aloft to the weak and oppressed of every nation. The tugs, like sturdy irrelevant office-seekers looking for loot, ploughed to and fro, indifferent to the coming adventures of the great leviathan — or greater than the great leviathan, the happiness in the heart of one woman on its deck.

Soon all that could be seen of the city was the distant overhanging smoke growing fainter and fainter. The arms of the Atlantic were opening wider and wider. America — and home — were only a memory. But what of that? Was she not going to Europe — to Europe! — with the big son, *her* son, who had made this dream reality?

Ahead of her were seven wonder days, — days of

quiet — days of infinite peace — days of rest and diversion and a laying aside at last of life's burdens. Seven days, indeed, with the trailing, furling smoke, the emerald green of the mountains of water, the impromptu rainbows, the gulls that knew no home by the ever-rocking cradle of the deep, the spray from the swells and the foam from the prow ; seven days with the swing and the swish through the hours ; seven afternoons to sit lazily upon the comfortable chairs of the deck and send her dream cargoes off homeward into the blood-red sunset that was setting for us too, at the same time, back home in New England. Seven nights for the engine to sing her to sleep with its sobbing and the melancholy double-strokes of the bells to mark off the great eternity of time and horizon, when the distance slipped away, past the eye and into the soul, and each low-hung sun on the rim of the world created a shadow-ship that kept them convoy into the mysterious depths of the night.

She stood by the rail of the gently swaying vessel in the late evening. And Tom came and stood by her side.

"Havin' a good time, mother?" he asked cheerily.

But she could not reply.

It meant something to her — this "Going Abroad." She had indeed paid for her passage.

"Mother, I was just going through my black suit to have the boy press it when I came across a letter a woman gave me for you two nights after you knuckled under and we thought you were going to leave us. She wanted to see you but we wouldn't let her in. She went off and returned with this envelope. Maybe you ought to open it. It might be something important."

There were many lights on deck. Tom led his mother to her steamer chair and she got her glasses. She tore open the envelope. Two papers came out. One was crumpled and wrinkled with long keeping. The other was a blotchy letter but recently written. She read the last first.

DEAR MARY:

I heard Thomas Joshua speak at the Tabernacle to-night and some of the things he said hurt me badly. You have six like Tom. I haven't even one. It ought to seem unfair but it isn't. You paid the price for them. I refused. It's a pretty square world after all. We get just about what we deserve.

I may not see you again, Mary. But for the sake of my soul I want to say something for the man I sent to the bad. I want some one besides me to appreciate him. When I went through his things after he disappeared twenty odd years ago, I found the enclosure. I didn't say anything about it at the time. Mean and dirty like I was, I intended to keep it, and trot it out to lord it over you and make you feel bad. I don't send it in that spirit now. I send it for a square deal for Herbert — some sort of poor compensation.

Good-by, Mary Purse. I won't say God Bless You for that is superfluous. He has done that already and amply. I say, pray God for me, — a lonely woman. My cup of sorrow and remorse is very very full.

MABEL HENDERSON.

Mary's old hand trembled a bit as she slowly lowered the letter. Wonderingly, she picked up the enclosure from her black-silk lap.

It was plainly a receipt for money paid. Across the top in big type were the names:

PITS, HULING, DONOVAN &
WILEY, Attorneys.
Chicago, Ill.

And on the face of the receipt was the information

Received of Herbert Truman, Paris, Vt., — \$6000 for transfer to Mrs. John Purse, under terms and conditions specified in correspondence, Jan. 17th to May 10th inclusive, purporting to come from estate of late Josiah Wood, Bankrupt. Less usual commissions.

For the partnership,
A. V. WILEY.

The import of the document dawned upon her. With some of her oldtime vigor, Mary sprang from the chair. She went to the railing. She stood there with her eyes turned back over the sea toward home.

Herb Truman had been responsible for that legacy!

The ship swung softly from side to side. From down on the surface of the waters came the ceaseless swash of the spray. Pedestrians paced the deck. From somewhere far up forward an orchestra was playing dreamy music.

But of these things Mary Purse took no note.

The moon came up after a time, and made a fantastic dreamy place of the infinite wastes of water. Lovers laughed in the shadowed nooks and corners. The black smoke from the funnels trailed off to the distances like a cloud of unleashed black phantoms.

Her thoughts were back in New England where the peaceful dream-time of the summer night was upon

the landscape and the crickets were cheeping down in the roots of the ragged lilacs.

And here, with her lack-lustre eyes fixed on unspeakable solitude, let us leave her. Let us leave her and go back to our labors and our town and newspaper and the ordinary two-legged men and women who remain. Let us bid her farewell and see her sail away in the path of the moonlight, calling "Bon Voyage" to her, trusting that the time may come soon when we may join the familiar faces and hear again the familiar voices with her in the Great Port where storm-tossed humanity comes safely to harbor at last.

For some day, please God, it shall come our turn also to embark upon a journey, — to take a ship and sail away for the Port of Missing Faces. Then like Mary Purse, as she draws softly out of our hearts and out of our story, we will become one with the thousands of souls on the bosom of the Infinite; we too will be a flash of phosphorus washed on the evening billows.

THE END.

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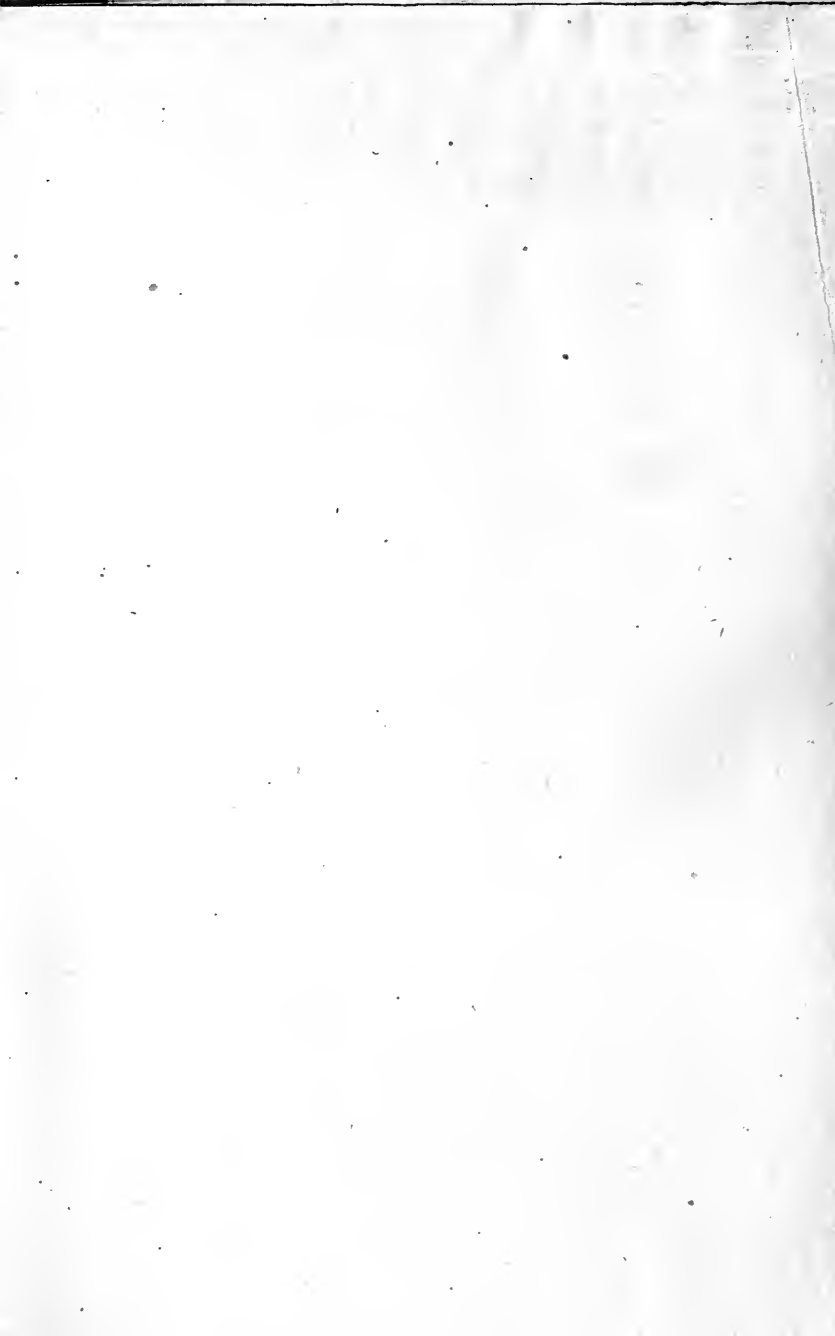
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